

THE INDEPENDENT

Thursday 11 December 1997 (IR50p) 45p No 3,479

Rage, resignations and rebellion: Blair breaks his party's heart

Tears, rage, rebellion and a ministerial resignation last night greeted Tony Blair's decision to drive his own MPs into the Commons lobbies with Tories like Michael Howard and John Redwood to cut the benefits of lone parents. Anthony Bevins, Political Editor, reports on the agony underlying last night's big government majority.

Taunts by William Hague, the protest resignation of a Scottish Office minister, and a defiant revolt by some ministerial aides and backbench MPs could not eclipse the heart-breaking agony of many Labour MPs as they backed the Government in the Commons last night.

One long-standing Labour backbencher, who was intending to vote for the Government, told *The Independent*: "I am very angry in myself with what I am doing tonight ... it makes me weep." He then stopped dead and went silent on the telephone. He was crying.

Asked why he had broken down, he said: "Because I am wrong." In that case, why was he planning to back the Government? "Because I have spent the last 17 years trying to get rid of the Conservatives. I can't bring myself not to vote for them ...". He broke down again, and put the phone down.

The Government was guaranteed an overwhelming Labour-Tory alliance majority to cut benefits for new lone-parent claimants from April, by between £4.95 to £10.25 a week, compared with current claimants. But the spirit of New Labour was badly damaged by the clash between ideals and practice. The Blair honeymoon ended in tears.

Alice Mahon, a ministerial aide to Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, and therefore subject to frontbench discipline, told a press conference: "Never in a million years, when I was fighting the May election, did I believe that a Labour government, the first Labour government for 18 years, would actually take this punitive approach to people who, arguably, we should be increasing benefit for."

Afterwards, she explained why she was planning to vote against the Government - on pain of dismissal. "As a human being," she said, "I have absolutely no choice. I am 60 years old, I've spent 40-odd years in the Labour Party, working at every level, and never, never did I think I would be asked to take money away from the poorest people in the country. It's about our values." She added: "It's almost like a bereavement."

But while many MPs were distressed by the Government decision to force them into last night's vote, others were enraged. One

new woman MP said she would be voting "with a heavy heart", but she added: "This is a decision badly made."

While there was common Labour backbench agreement that something has to be done to break the cycle of benefits and dependency, helping people from welfare and into work, the common view was that the cut for lone parents was being taken much too soon.

Another new woman MP who was voting for her government said: "I am furious; I am so angry about it because it has been so badly managed. I am a loyalist; I don't believe I was elected on a platform of dissent. At the same time, however, I feel that this is wrong because it is wrong to remove benefit before there is anything in its place. That is a management question, and exactly the wrong thing to get macho over, as they have done. I'm angry because it is unnecessary."

One backbench man said he was appalled and outraged, and he warned that there would be casualties among lone-parent families. Yet was voting for his government out of loyalty.

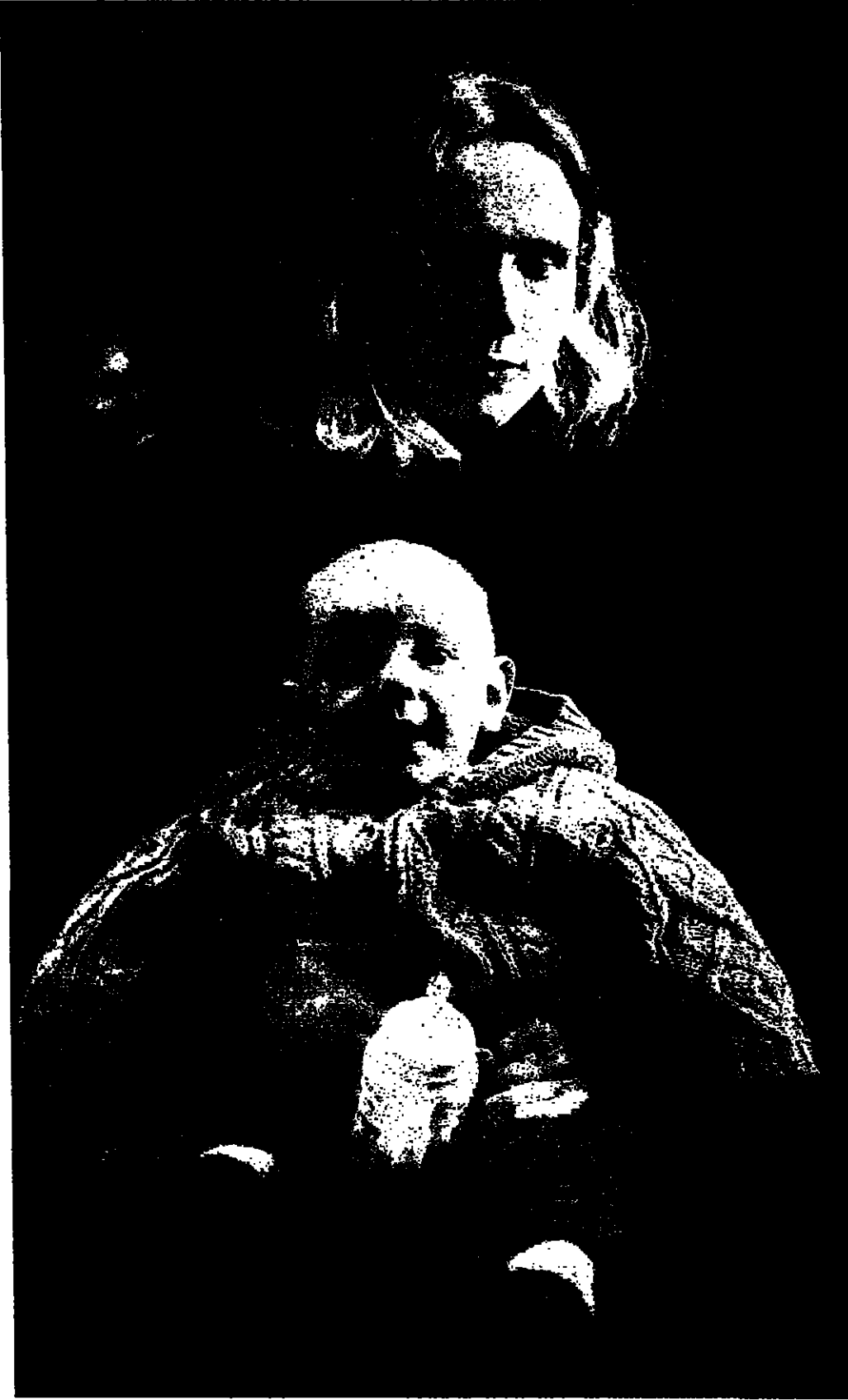
"It is not a question of cowardice," he said. "It is simply that I refuse to believe that I have to vote against a Labour government. They have no right to put us through this. This is not the way to do it. We are hitting the most deprived people of all. This is the dispossessed that we are talking about. It is a disaster."

But in Commons questions earlier, the Prime Minister stood his ground against an onslaught from the Conservative leader. Mr Hague said Labour MPs would be "dragged through the lobbies to vote for a measure they called shameful, malign and completely wrong. It is another example of government without principles or values."

The Tory leader, whose own party was voting with the Government, in support of a measure that was first proposed by the Conservative government, asked Mr Blair: "Isn't it the case of us having the courage of our convictions, one resigned minister having the courage of his convictions and the Labour Party in general having neither courage nor conviction?"

Mr Blair told the House: "There are different priorities, but we believe the most important thing is to help those lone parents off benefits and into work and do so in a way that doesn't lose control of public finances."

Mr Hague repeatedly asked Mr Blair why he had not warned the voters of Labour's plans before the election. The Prime Minister said it was incorrect to say Labour had not spoken of its proposals. He said: "I have the comments we made before the election when we said we will stick with the existing budget but we can offer better and different ways of getting lone parents back into work."



Spoils of war: The issue of lone parents wrecked the unity of the Labour backbenches last night, as MPs wrestled with their consciences. Photograph: David Rose

TODAY'S NEWS

EU wants to ban lamb on the bone

Many of the most popular cuts of lamb could be banned after European scientists called for tough restrictions on the sale of lamb. They recommended a ban of sales of certain types of lamb on the bone from animals over six months old in countries where there is a risk from BSE. All EU countries should ban the cuts from animals over 12 months.

The bulk of UK lamb sales involves animals aged six to 12 months with only a tiny market for "new season" lambs under six months old. Around 90 per cent of British lamb is sold on the bone. If the ban is introduced it would prevent the sale of cuts such as rack of lamb, and lamb chops, although not leg of lamb.

If the Government acts on the recommendation, which is similar to that made last week by British scientists over beef on the bone, it would mean a dramatic reduction in the amount of lamb being sold. But Jack Cunningham, the Secretary of State for Agriculture, last night ruled out any hasty response and said he would stick to advice given by SEAC last week that no further controls were needed on sheep and meat. Page 4

TV licence fee to rise over inflation RUC Catholics suffer harassment

Chris Smith, the Secretary of State for Culture, will today confirm an inflation-busting increase in the BBC's annual licence fee for next year. Viewers will have to pay £97.50 next year for a colour television licence, an increase of £6 (6.6 per cent) on this year - in line with the Conservative Government's five year licence formula unveiled last year. After 1998, there will be one further above-inflation increase, before the fee dips below inflation in 2000 and 2001. Page 22

Confidential Royal Ulster Constabulary research, obtained exclusively by *The Independent*, reveals that at least 30 per cent of Catholic officers have experienced religious discrimination or harassment from colleagues or superior officers. The unpublished internal report will dismay the authorities at a time when the Government and the RUC itself are anxious to recruit more Catholics into the ranks. The report is based on the most extensive survey conducted by the force. Page 3

All that Kyoto heat, for next to nothing

After a night of agonising last minute negotiations, an agreement on a new treaty to combat global warming hung in the balance. But the long-sought agreement will do little to slow down the heating of the planet, predict Nicholas Schoon and Richard Lloyd Parry in Kyoto.

Delegations from 160 countries were struggling to reach agreement on a treaty to tackle the threat of catastrophic climate change. With hours to go before delegates were due to fly home from Japan, the UN environment conference was deadlocked in some of the most complex international negotiations ever undertaken.

The Kyoto Protocol is intended to be the first concerted, legally binding attempt to tackle the dangers of global warming caused by humanity's fast rising emissions of heat trapping gases.

But the compromises required to bring together governments as diverse as the United States, China and Middle East oil producers, have dis-

appointed environmentalists, vulnerable island nations, and the European Union. All three wanted to go further and faster in cutting emissions than Europe's main trading rivals, Japan and the US.

With many of the details of its implementation unresolved, the Kyoto conference amounts to little more than an opening declaration of war against global warming. After 10 days and several nights of intensive, against-the-clock negotiations, the developed countries including Russia and those of Eastern Europe were expected to cut their annual emissions of six key greenhouse gases by 6 per cent by 2012, compared to their 1990 level.

But hours after the conference's scheduled close, delegates from 150 nations were still arguing through the night over most of the same issues which have divided them over the last 10 days.

The latest draft of the protocol made an indecisive start on reducing the risk of dangerous swings in climate and rises in sea level. It would not actually stop emissions rising because the fast-growing pollution from developing countries would outweigh the modest

cuts by the rich ones. That means the build-up of greenhouse gases would continue to accelerate - and so would climate change. But the hope was that a similar treaty for developing nations could be negotiated in the next few years.

After beginning the conference poles apart, Europe and the US managed to agree late yesterday on a similar target for cutting emissions of some 6 per cent. But the European Union was still trying to close potential loopholes which it feared could drastically reduce the cuts America had to make. And the developing nations - principally China and the oil-producing Arab States - balked at an American demand that they commit to reducing their own emissions.

A burst of telephone diplomacy between heads of government, including Tony Blair, Bill Clinton, the Japanese prime minister, Ryutaro Hashimoto, failed to end the wrangling.

But the proposed treaty would mark the birth of a new global trading commodity - emissions licenses, which will be sold by countries with low emissions and bought by heavy polluters aiming to burn fossil fuels above their quota.

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Esther McLaughlin, awarded a record £250,000 said she was a victim of mental bullying

Photograph: Rui Xavier

Woman executive wins record damages over sex bias

A senior local-authority manager yesterday won record damages of more than £230,000 after claiming sex discrimination. Barrie Clement, Labour Editor, talked to Esther McLaughlin, who believes she was the victim of a sub-culture dominated by men.

Angry officials at the London borough of Southwark yesterday registered their intention to appeal against a historic ruling on sex discrimination.

Esther McLaughlin, who used to work as a £45,000 a year assistant director of finance, personnel and strategy, claimed she was dismissed

simply because she was a woman. She told the tribunal that when she was appointed to the post in 1992 she was not allowed to undertake jobs on her own, was moved from department to department and given other tasks just as she got to grips with a project.

Ms McLaughlin, a 46-year-old mother of two daughters, said she was the victim of "mental bullying" and described how her case was treated with "disdain" by the council. It was difficult to criticise the regime at Southwark because a person in her position might look as if she was not capable of performing her job. She accused "several key officials at director level" of knowingly presiding over her misery, some of whom are still in post.

Eventually she claimed she

was singled out among a number of male colleagues for dismissal and that contentions that it was a legitimate redundancy constituted a "sham". When she was forced to leave the council she felt "shock, self-doubt, anger and a sense of injustice", but as breadwinner had to get on with her life.

She was unemployed for six months after leaving Southwark in October 1994. Ms McLaughlin now works at British Gas as a contract manager in charge of 600 temporary workers.

Her award - the highest for sex discrimination not involving a pregnancy - was calculated on the basis that it would take four years before she could secure a post at the same level as her job at Southwark. The £234,362 award included a substantial amount for

injury to her feelings. The council was prevented from defending its case after failing to disclose documents on the order of the industrial tribunal.

In a statement yesterday Southwark Council, whose five most senior officials are men, said the judgement had been based upon a "technicality" and that there was "compelling evidence" to show that she was treated as fairly as all other employees affected by the council's restructuring proposals. The shake-up was aimed at releasing more resources for "front-line" services, the statement said.

The council insisted that the process affected male and female employees across the council equally. Ms McLaughlin had been involved from an early stage in shaping and implementing the proposals.

Widespread discrimination against Catholics in RUC

Confidential Royal Ulster Constabulary research, obtained exclusively by *The Independent*, concludes that at least 30 per cent of Catholic officers have experienced religious discrimination or harassment from colleagues or superior officers. David McKittrick, Ireland Correspondent, examines an alarming report.

The striking conclusions of the unpublished internal report will dismay the authorities at a time when the Government and the RUC are anxious to recruit more Catholics into the ranks.

The report, commissioned and carried out by the RUC, is based on what is described as probably the most extensive survey ever conducted within the constabulary. Among its findings are:

- at least 29 per cent of all Catholic members had experienced religious harassment from colleagues;
- at least 12 per cent had experienced religious discrimination by superiors;
- 34 per cent reported being disillusioned with their career;
- 21 per cent had considered leaving the force due to discrimination or harassment.

The document, *Force Research Branch - survey of religious and political harassment and discrimination in the RUC*, has just reached the hands of senior officers. There are already signs that they will take it seriously.

Ronnie Flanagan, the RUC Chief Constable said last night: "I am determined that religious harassment must be eliminated. The results of this survey will be fully con-

sidered, and we will put in place a range of measures through training, education and supervision to ensure that inappropriate language and behaviour is eliminated."

Each one of the RUC's 12,800 regular and reserve officers was sent a questionnaire. About one-third responded. The report comments that the survey was unpopular with a number of officers, some of whom returned questionnaires uncompleted or ripped up. The survey followed an earlier report which indicated that almost half of female officers had experienced sexual harassment in the force.

In most cases, instances of discrimination were not officially reported by Catholic officers, who explained that they did not want to be victimised or did not believe anything would be done about it.

The report will be seen as giving solid statistical foundation to criticisms that the RUC is in need of urgent reform. One of the advocates of reform, former Northern Ireland Police Authority member Chris Ryder, wrote recently: "RUC canteen culture is still stubbornly male, Protestant, British, Unionist and laddish. The hard-drinking days are gone but there remains a hardcore allegiance to values and practices that compromise the concept of an even-handed, impartial police service."

The report contains a few grains of consolation for the authorities, but not many. On the one hand a majority of both Catholic and Protestant respondents rated the problem of religious harassment as not serious, many concluding that it had become less of a problem. Similarly, more than 40 per cent of Catholic respondents felt discrimination had become less of a problem. Furthermore, half of Catholics believed the force as a whole treated them equally with Protestants, while another 13 per cent thought it treated them better than their Protestant colleagues.

On the other hand more than one-third of Catholic respondents felt harassment remained a serious problem, while only 11 per cent of Catholic respondents, together with 14 per cent of Protestants, considered there was no discrimination in the force.

Of the Catholic officers who responded to the survey, 280 said they had experienced harassment. This figure represents 63 per cent of Catholic respondents and 29 per cent of the force's Catholic membership.

The report comments: "These results tell us that at least 29 per cent of all 964 Catholics in the RUC, and three per cent of all Protestants, have experienced religious harassment during their careers. These levels could be higher if others who had experienced harassment did not reply to the survey."

The report indicates that some Protestants had also complained of sectarian behaviour by other officers.

According to the report: "The most common form of religious harassment was sectarian jokes, banter or sectarian songs, with 92 per cent of Catholic respondents who had been harassed and 64 per cent of Protestant respondents stating that they had experienced this on one or more occasions."

"Of the less common forms of harassment more Catholics than Protestants reported experiencing inappropriate displays of flags and emblems, displays of sectarian posters, graffiti, circulation of sectarian notes or letters, isolation and non-cooperation."

The report concludes: "At a force level we can be sure that at least 12 per cent of all Catholics in the RUC, and three per cent of all Protestants, have experienced religious discrimination during their careers. The true level of discrimination may be higher than this as non-respondents may also have experienced discrimination."

Police chief tries to stamp out male culture

A detective was made to resign yesterday and two of his colleagues received hefty fines following "unacceptable behaviour" at a party in a police training centre. Alexandra Williams asks if the first woman Chief Constable is determined to stamp out macho male culture within the police force.

The tough disciplinary action followed a party held at Lancashire police headquarters involving a strippogram dressed as a policeman.

Detective Constable Joseph Scanlan, 32, pleaded guilty to discreditable conduct in a two-day disciplinary hearing. He was asked to resign by the Chief Constable of

Lancashire Pauline Clare. Another officer, Detective Constable Mark Shepherd, 29, was fined £1,000 and a third, Detective Constable Philip Dawson, was fined £500.

Mrs Clare is Britain's first woman chief constable. She was appointed in June 1995 in the wake of the sex discrimination case which Alison Halford, an assistant chief constable, brought against the force but eventually dropped after an agreement on a cash package and pension.

The severity of the penalties imposed on the officers is seen by some as an indication of Mrs Clare attempting to stamp out the male-dominated canteen culture.

Roger Graef, a criminologist, film maker and author of books about the police force and produced the documentary series on the Thames Valley Police, said Mrs Clare's actions were very positive.

"It's very rare for such penalties to result from a hearing. She has sent a signal

within her force that this kind of thing can't be tolerated. Many chief constables feel the same way as Mrs Clare but it's very hard to change this canteen culture."

"This may pave the way for further developments. She'll probably be hated and used as an example as to why we shouldn't have women chief constables but there'll be a lot of officers quietly celebrating tonight," he said.

Mrs Clare heard how officers licked cream and chocolate from the body of a 17-year-old strippogram in a bar attached to a police training centre at the Lancashire police headquarters in Hutton.

The incident, attended by more than 60 officers, was filmed by the stripper's minder and subsequently sold to two Sunday newspapers which printed stills. Twenty-two officers from 11 forces were brought before the hearing for their behaviour at the party on 3 February.

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Lamb faces the chop in latest meat scare

Public confidence in lamb as well as beef took a hammering yesterday after EU scientists recommended a Europe-wide ban on some lamb on the bone. Katherine Butler in Brussels says it could mean the end of sales of certain cuts.

European scientists want tough restrictions on the sale of lamb on the bone, it emerged yesterday. The committee dealt a new blow to the meat industry, reeling from the recent ban of beef on the bone. It recommended a ban on sales of lamb on the bone from animals over 12 months old.

But, crucially for the British market, and the 90,000 sheep farmers in the UK, the scientists said that in countries where the incidence of BSE or scrapie in

flocks is particularly high, "it may be appropriate" to ban meat on the bone from animals as young as six months.

The panel of scientists which advises Brussels on food safety and which is independent of European governments, said rack of lamb, and lamb chops or cutlets should be banned. It recommended that a ban on cattle sheep and goat brains and offal, due to come into force throughout the EU early next year, should be extended to cover vertebral column and dorsal root ganglia of all three species. The warning adds to consumer confusion and alarm by raising questions for the first time over the safety of lamb and mutton sold on the bone, particularly from animals older than 12 months old.

European Commission officials will have to conduct thorough research on the risks from lamb but they stressed that factors highlighted by the scientists

would have to be weighed against the consequences of a ban, such as the impact on trade, the cost and the problem of disposal of carcasses. "The Commission may decide that a ban would be too drastic when set against the risks, but for the moment we cannot say," said a spokesman. He added that the coming weeks and months would be spent trying to establish a "complete picture" of the risks, taking account of the age, species and geographical origin of animals.

Either way, the damage to consumer confidence is likely to be extensive. Scrapie in sheep was not previously believed to pose a threat to human health but is thought to be much more prevalent in European flocks than governments have officially admitted. Its similarity to BSE prompted the Commission's initial decision to include sheep offal in its crackdown on "specified risk material".

BSE scientist was 'censored'

A former government scientist who was one of the first to investigate BSE and identify it in cats claims that his work was "censored" by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), which prevented him from publishing work that would have pointed to the disease's emergence in humans.

Jain McGill worked at the Central Veterinary Laboratory (CVL) with Gerald Wells, the vet who in 1986 first identified "mad cow disease", or bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE).

He says that attempts by him and Mr Wells to submit a paper about the emergence of BSE in cats in 1990 were censored by officials within MAFF, who threatened to invoke the Official

Secrets Act to prevent them submitting their work to scientific journals.

"I think censorship is the word I would use to describe what happened with that paper," Mr McGill says on tonight's edition of Channel 4's *Dispatches* programme. "They wanted us to take out any references suggesting a causal link between BSE and the new disease in cats."

In May 1990 he and Mr Wells examined a cat which had died in Bristol. Their immediate reaction was that the cat had died from a disease related to - or even caused by - BSE. They informed their managers of their suspicions.

Days later, the chief veteri-

nary officer, Keith Meldrum, went on TV to discuss the case. But he said the disease was "highly unlikely" to be BSE "because of the precautions that have been taken by various people", though he added he "could not give a guarantee ... what it is".

Mr McGill thinks that Mr Meldrum would have known about their diagnosis. Did he think Mr Meldrum's reply was scientific thinking? "I think it's wishful thinking."

He says that when he worked at MAFF, "the way it was structurally set up was not that the science would drive the politics, but that the politics will drive the science. And that's wrong".

Wayward balloon set for another uplifting experience



Richard Branson's flyaway balloon canopy (above) was yesterday under guard in Algeria - and tied to a tree in case it tried to escape again, writes Charles

Arthur. Last night Mr Branson's co-pilot, Per Lindstrand, was preparing to go there and take it back by aircraft to the airbase outside Marrakesh, Mo-

rocco, where it escaped its moorings after a gust broke one of the securing ropes on Tuesday. The team hope to launch a fresh attempt on the non-

stop ballooning record - and particularly to circumnavigate the world - at the weekend. "Hopefully we will be ready by Sunday if the weather

conditions are good and the balloon is not too damaged," Mr Branson said. Four other teams are aiming for the record. Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid

Anorexia links

Problems with relationships were by far the most common stressful event which preceded the onset of an eating disorder according to findings published in the *British Journal of Medical Psychology*.

Nearly six out of 10 anorexics had suffered a severe difficulty which precipitated the onset of the disorder.

Previous studies found that around three quarters of those with eating disorders had suffered severe problems in the previous year compared with around 40 per cent of women as a whole.

C4 recycles its old stars

Channel 4 is going back to its roots in 1998 by re-uniting its comedy stars of the Eighties in a new *Comic Strip Presents* while celebrating the Eighties generation of comedians in a new series.

Dawn French, Jennifer Saunders, Rik Mayall, Adrian Edmondson, Nigel Planer and Peter Richardson have been brought together by the channel in *The Comic Strip Presents... Four men in a Car*.

The script for the film is still in development with writers Peter Richardson and Pete Richens, but the outline plot involves four salesmen in a car are travelling to a sales conference in a car and come across some adventures.

Boy, 14, bailed

A 14-year-old boy sobbed in the dock yesterday after being convicted of attempting to rape a 13-year-old schoolfriend.

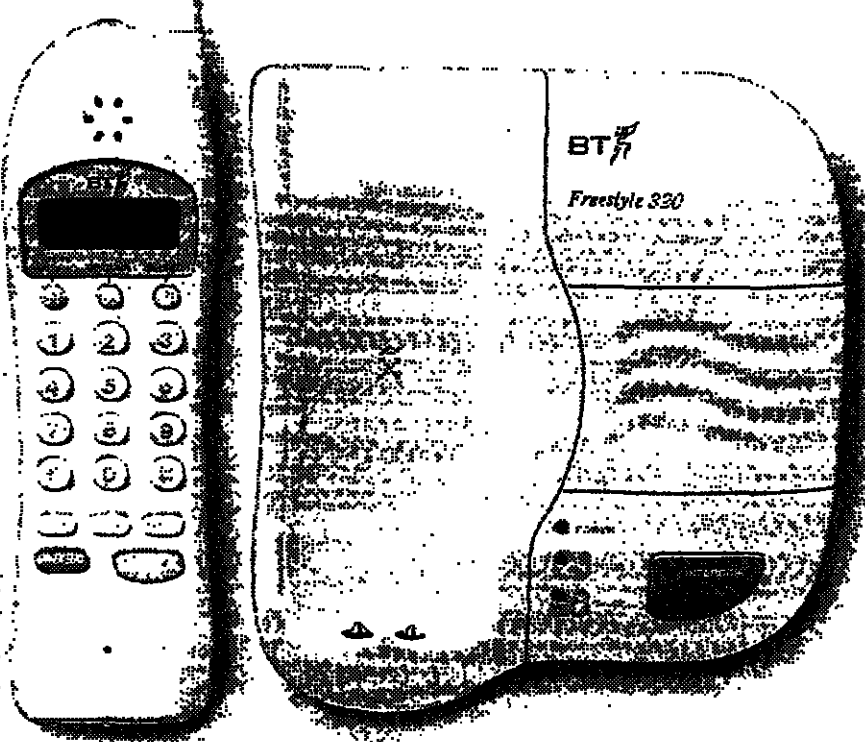
The boy was found not guilty of raping the girl on a disused railway line in Wolverhampton. The jury found him guilty of attempted rape.

The boy was also convicted on an 11-1 majority verdict of indecently assaulting the girl. He had denied all charges.

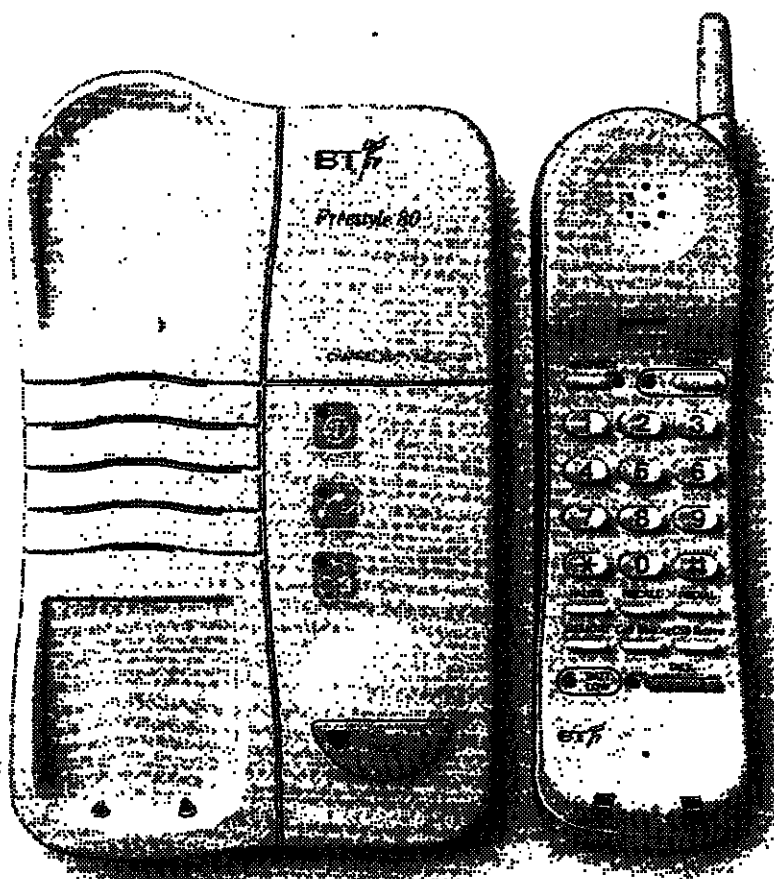
He was remanded on bail by Judge Christopher Hodson at Wolverhampton Crown Court for pre-sentence reports.

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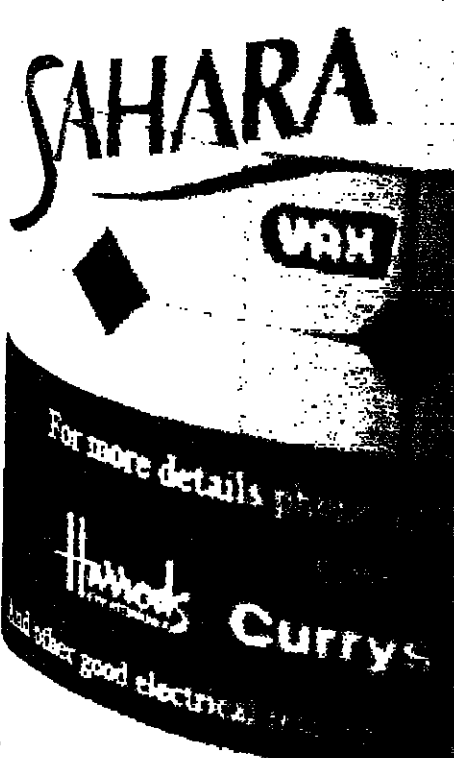
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Schools told to tackle drug problem

Some schools are still sweeping the issue of drug abuse under the carpet, heads said yesterday.

Yet some five-year-olds now know more about drugs than their teachers, headteachers' leaders warned.

Judith Judd, Education Editor, examines the issues.

New advice from a headteachers' association warns schools that they should call in the police when they discover drug incidents but should not search or test pupils for drugs.

The guidelines on drugs, alcohol, tobacco and solvent abuse, the first to be issued by the National Association of Head Teachers for a decade, aim to promote a consistent approach to drug-taking.

Pressure to protect schools' reputation in a competitive market has made some heads reluctant to report drug incidents to the police.

Peter Walker, head of the Abbey School, in Faversham, Kent and a member of the Home Office drug education committee, said: "There are schools which wish to sweep the issue under the carpet but they are just keeping the lid on a problem that will explode."

David Hart, the association's general secretary, said: "No school in the country is a safe haven when it comes to dealing with drugs offences."

The background to the new guidelines, say the heads, are changes in society which mean that one child in two has experimented with drugs by the age of 15.

Liz Paver, the association's president and head of Intake

Primary School, Doncaster, said: "Many children coming into schools are living in communities where drug abuse is rife. They come in educated about drugs beyond the education of their own teachers."

"Children who are involved in solvent abuse are getting younger and younger. Seven, eight and nine-year-olds in gangs are abusing solvents."

She quoted examples of a nursery school which had to sweep the playground every day for syringes and a school where a six-year-old told a teacher that she was sent to bed every night while her parents took heroin downstairs.

Mr Walker said that drug-taking started at a very early age. There were 12 solvents such as nail varnish and paint remover in most homes. Only about three or four per cent of drug-taking took place in schools.

The guidelines warn heads that they should not search children suspected of having drugs. Ms Paver said that searching children left teachers open to accusations of assault.

"We are in a position where parents can go to law and we have to be more careful than we used to be. Twenty years ago I would always have cuddled a crying child. I wouldn't dream of doing it now."

If she suspected a child was concealing drugs, she would send for a responsible adult and ask them to do the searching.

The guidelines also advise against drug testing. Mr Walker said: "I would be worried about creating fear among youngsters, about the expense and about the possibility of encouraging youngsters to move on to harder drugs which were less easily detectable."

Heads should recognise that drug and alcohol abuse may be the sign of a child's problems and should not automatically exclude them, the guidelines say.

Newcastle gains accolade as sexiest university



Lucky lads: Students enjoying themselves at Newcastle, which allegedly boasts the prettiest females in the UK Photograph: Ian Duncan

Prospective students in search of attractive women should head for Manchester or Newcastle University. Those wanting attractive men will find them at University College, London and Bournemouth. And those who are more interested in brilliant teaching should apply to Manchester, followed by Oxford and Durham.

That, at least, is the view of students who visited the Red Mole student website, in the last three months. More than 2000 students rated their universities on a scale of one to five in categories such as nightlife and accommodation.

Architecture, careers advice, freshers' week, relations with the locals, student union services, sporting and computer facilities were also assessed. Overall, Newcastle University came first, University College, London second and Manchester, third.

Two former polytechnics, Manchester Metropolitan University and Leeds Metropolitan both made it into the top 10. Students at the University of Central England were unhappiest with their lot.

The University of Wales in Cardiff, the students say, has the best places to stay - followed by Durham and Kent. Thames Valley's accommodation was voted the least impressive.

The contest for architecture was won by Durham and Oxford and lost by the universities of Essex and of Central England. Greenwich and the University of the West of England came bottom for attractive females. Nightlife was rated best in Newcastle with Northumbria University top and its older neighbour, Newcastle, second. Birmingham and Bristol were next but Aberystwyth came bottom.

— Judith Judd

Fees fail to bridge universities' growing funding gap

Universities are facing a funding gap of half a billion pounds by the millennium despite the Government's plans to charge students more, MPs say today. Although the report backs £1,000-a-year bills for fees, Fran Abrams writes, it will fuel the campaign against them.

The reforms would be "all pain and no gain" in the short term, said the chair of the Commons Education and Employment Select Committee, Margaret Hodge.

Without more resources, student poverty would continue and a cap on student numbers would remain in place, she said.

She supported the Government's decision to impose a £1,000-per-year fee on students and to phase out maintenance grants.

"But the money will not be on stream soon enough. It will not protect provision over the next two years," she said.

The committee heard that £165m extra given to universities for 1998-99 would not help in the longer term. By 1999-2000 an additional £265m would be needed, only £100m of which could be met through fee payments.

The committee recommended two solutions to the problem. First, it said, universities could take over the running of the student loans scheme themselves. By establishing a not-for-profit trust and borrowing money on the markets with the Government as a guarantor, they could get good rates of interest and would channel repayments into their own funds. This would free up government expenditure for other things, including extra funding for universities.

Second, the Treasury could change its accounting system so that loan payments to students could be removed from the public spending totals. Thus, the fact that they would eventually be repaid would be taken into account, and extra money could be freed up. However, this would not create a "pot of gold", the committee said.

The report on Sir Ron Dearing's recommendations on higher education and the Government's response to it led to a split among Labour members of the committee.

Two Labour members, Gerry Steinberg and Joe Benton, argued that the Government had been wrong to introduce tuition fee charges.

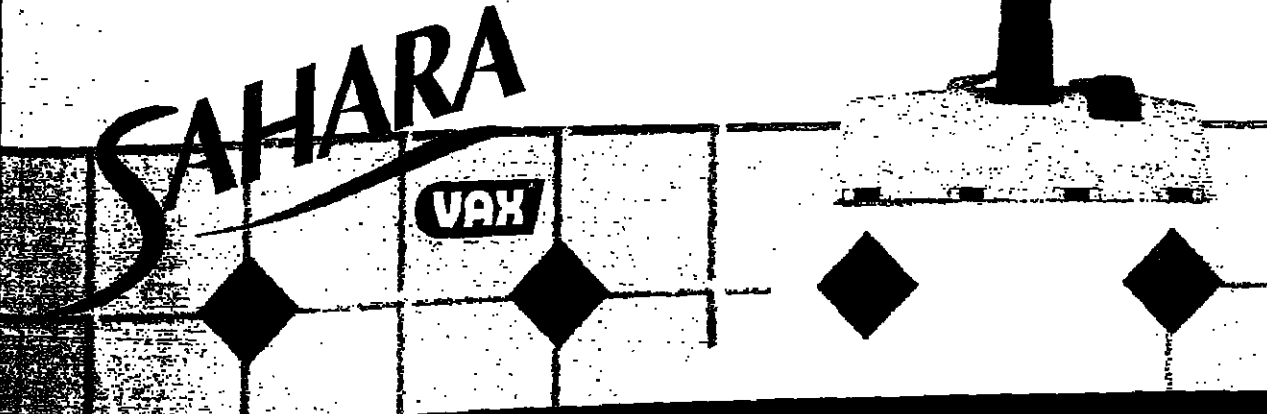
An amendment to the report, proposed by Mr Steinberg and backed by Mr Benton as well as by Liberal Democrat and Conservative members, said the charge would deter young people from lower income backgrounds from going to university. It was defeated by the Labour majority on the committee.

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Euthanasia ruled out as use of living wills extended

A Green Paper on how to protect people unable to make crucial decisions for themselves was published yesterday. Suggestions include greater use of living wills and formal powers for relatives or friends - but not euthanasia. Michael Streeter and Fran Abrams look at the issue.

The Lord Chancellor said yesterday that the law on the rights of the mentally incapacitated was "confusing and fragmented" and needed reform. It affected not just those unable to make decisions but those relatives and friends who cared for them too.

On the day an MP introduced a Bill on doctor-assisted dying. Lord Irvine said many of the issues involved in the Green Paper, such as so-called living wills, were controversial and needed careful public consultation.

The document, *Who Decides?*, modelled on a 1985 Law Commission report, lays out the categories of people who would be covered by any new laws.

These are: those who have never had "capacity", for example people who grow up with severe learning difficulties; those who have had such capacity removed, for example by an accident, and those who, when elderly, lose their capacity.

Some living wills - called "advanced statements" - in which people rule out certain treatment in the future, on moral or other grounds, are already recognised by law but the

Government is suggesting this should be extended.

In particular the wills could be used to specify treatment. Officials describe this as "clarification" after the recent case of Annie Lindell, a motor-neurone disease sufferer who sought a High Court declaration that her doctor could use drugs to ease her suffering, even though these were likely to hasten her death. She died last week.

Lord Irvine told the House of Lords that there was no question of doctors being forced to act illegally. "An advance statement could not, for example, ask a doctor deliberately to end life," he said.

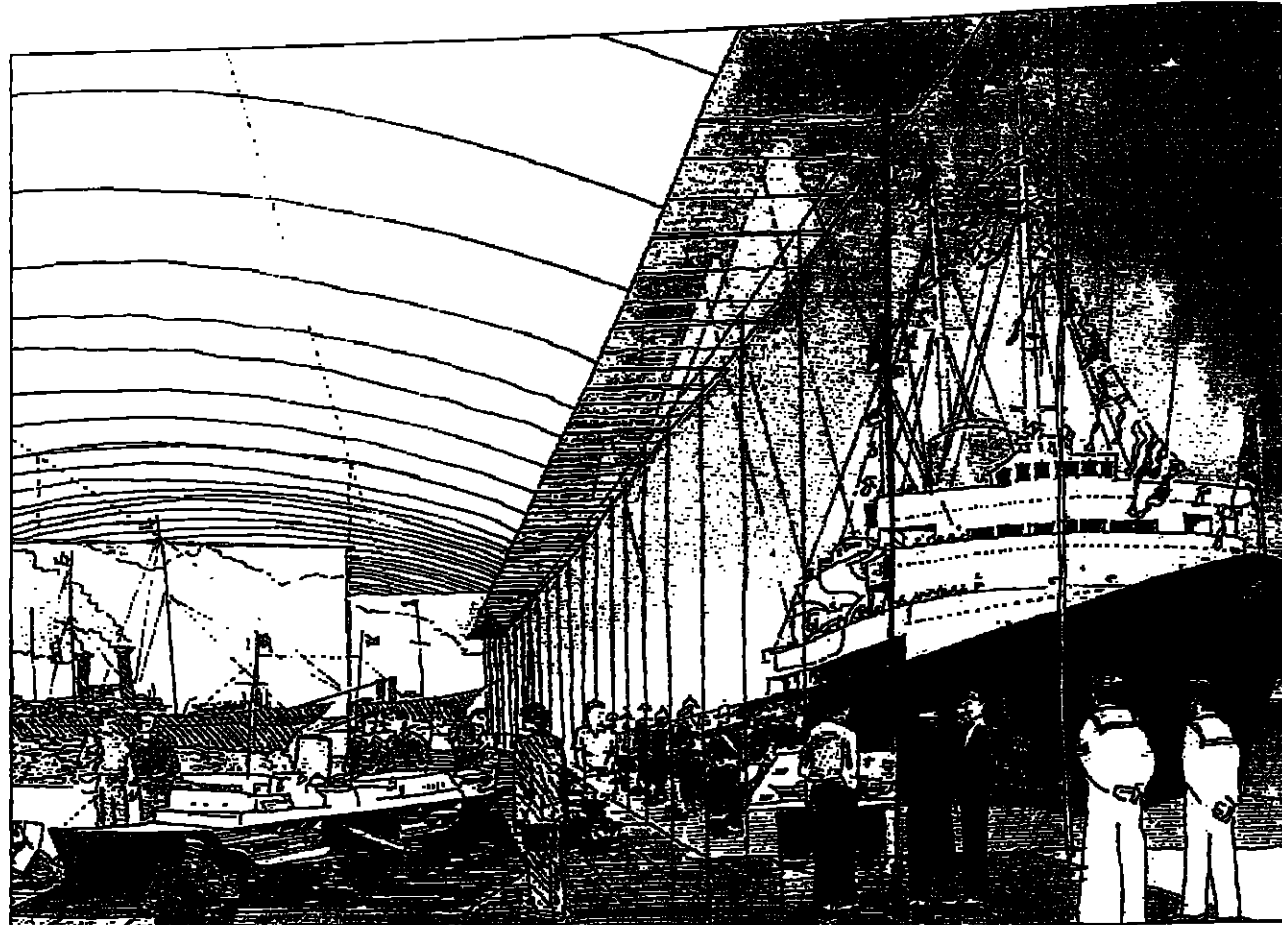
He also made it clear that euthanasia - a deliberate act by a third party to shorten someone's life - was not up for consultation and would remain illegal.

Another key element is the

proposal to extend the existing power of attorney - which deals with financial matters - to personal and health care. This new Continuing Power of Attorney could be used by someone who feared they may one day lose their decision-making capacity to nominate a trusted relative or friend to authorise treatment on their behalf.

The paper also seeks suggestions on defining "incapacity", and setting up a legal framework to govern day-to-day decisions made by carers.

Conservative MP Ann Widdecombe said the measures on living wills and plans to extend the power of attorney to health decisions made her feel "very uncomfortable indeed". It would be wrong if patients in adjoining beds received different treatment because one had made a living will, she said.



Final berth: An artist's impression of the Trafalgar Centre at Dumbarton, one of two proposed sites for Britannia

'Britannia' heading for safe waters

The Royal Yacht *Britannia* will end her days in Edinburgh or on the Manchester Ship Canal, George Robertson, the Secretary of State for Defence, said last night.

Negotiations with the rival consortia will now go ahead to decide which offers the best prospects for preserving the vessel. They will focus in particular on arrangements to ensure that *Britannia's* use and appearance are properly safeguarded.

"After 44 years of distinguished service to queen and country, *Britannia* has a special place in the people's affections," said Mr Robertson.

"This was confirmed by the many thousands who turned out to see her around the country on her final tour and by the interest shown in her preservation."

It would be wrong to scrap the Royal Yacht if there were acceptable ways to preserve her "for the wider benefit of the public", he added, and described the seven preservation proposals as "high quality" and very imaginative.

He said the proposals from Forth Ports for Edinburgh and Peel Holdings for Manchester

stood out from all the rest with funding in place and firm costed plans for the appropriate preservation and care of the ship.

"We will therefore disappoint some organisations who have worked very hard on their proposals," he said.

If the proposal by Forth Ports were successful, *Britannia* would be berthed on Edinburgh's waterfront at Leith alongside a planned multi-million pound ocean liner terminal designed by Sir Terence Conran.

It would be used for corporate hospitality and state functions with public access at other times. The consortium claims no public money or funds from the National Lottery would be required.

If the Peel Holdings proposal should win, *Britannia* would be berthed in a 16 acre Heritage site at Trafalgar Park. It would be moored adjacent to the historic Barton swingbridge, close to a new shopping and entertainment complex.

Britannia will be decommissioned at an emotional ceremony in Portsmouth naval base tomorrow attended by the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh and other members of the Royal Family.

Tories' fears over Euro-sceptic stand

A group of pro-European Tory MPs led by Kenneth Clarke, the former Chancellor, are heading for a showdown with the party leadership over growing fears that William Hague is adopting an increasingly Euro-sceptic stance for the Opposition.

The group of Positive European Tory MPs are planning to meet Lord Parkinson, the Conservative Party chairman next Monday to warn against turning the Tories into a narrow Euro-sceptic party. They are supported by former ministers including Ian Taylor and David Curry, who both resigned from Mr Hague's front bench in protest at the hardening of policy against the European single currency.

Lord Parkinson is expected to offer them reassurances that they have a place in the party, but they are determined to put down a marker before the Tories begin selecting candidates for the European elections, which they fear will be dominated by Euro-sceptics. There are continued rumours at Westminster that former Euro-sceptic MPs Tony Marlow and Nicholas Budgen could be on the lists of candidates.

Their message has been reinforced by a letter to Lord Parkinson from Lord Howe which friends of the former Chancellor have described as "stinging". Their fears were increased by the departure of Peter Temple Morris, one of the veteran leaders of the group, after having the whip removed from him by the Tory leadership.

John Major, the former Prime Minister, yesterday made an attempt to urge Mr Temple Morris to rejoin the party at a Press Gallery Luncheon in the House of Commons. With the former Tory MP sitting in the

audience, Mr Major said he would be welcome back in the party, if he chose to rejoin it.

Mr Temple Morris who has become an Independent sitting on the Labour benches made no move to do so and Mr Major's assurances were not backed up by party sources. "We withdrew the whip from him because he was openly talking about joining the Labour Party. We would want guarantees that would not happen again before readmitting him."

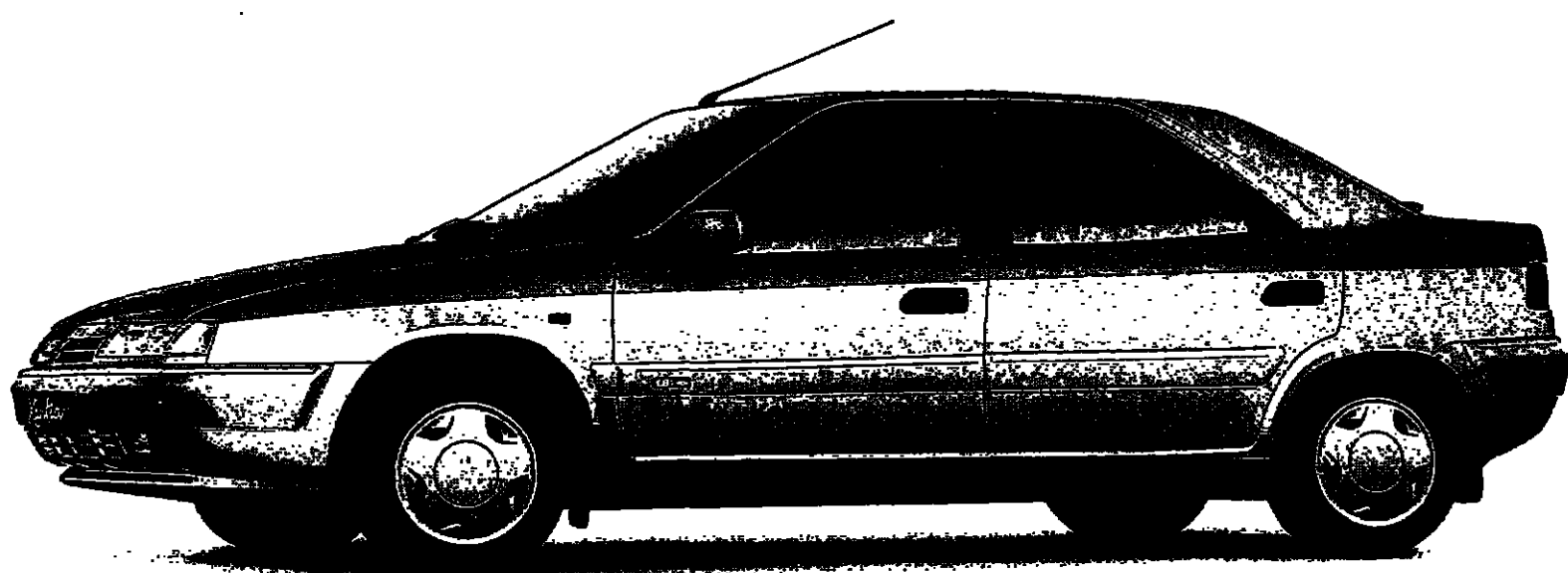
Mr Major said the Tory party had to be a right-of-centre party, but not exclusively right-wing. "We cannot win elections out on the right-wing. That is the way to becoming a minority party of no significance," Mr Major said.

One senior Tory MP said: "We have been keeping our heads down, but the real battle will be over the European elections. If we run a Euro-sceptic campaign, there will be more leaving the party."

● Mr Major said he was turning down financial offers to go into the City because he believed there had to be a longer "firebreak" between his term of office as Prime Minister and work outside Parliament than for other former ministers.

— Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

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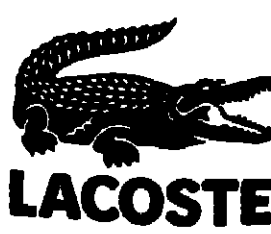


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7/LONE PARENTS

Blair savaged as angry MPs speak up for the 'betrayed'

The Prime Minister was confronted by Labour backbench anger over the cuts in benefits for lone parents at Question Time. Colin Brown, Chief, Political Correspondent, says a string of Labour MPs risked the wrath of the whips in speaking out against the Government.

Diane Abbott led the Labour backbench attack on the Government's cuts in benefits for lone parents by calling on the Prime Minister at Question Time to justify the cut.

Ms Abbott, a member of the left-wing Campaign Group of Labour MPs, said there would always be mothers who were not able to go out to work, even if the Government's Bill to help lone parents off benefit and into work was 100 per cent successful. As the House fell silent, Mr Blair defended the decision. "I have to say frankly to you we were elected as a government because people believed we would keep tight control of public finance and we said that clearly before the election."

"What is important is to get as many people as possible off benefit and into work."

Mr Blair also rejected criticism from Paddy Ashdown, the Liberal Democrat leader, who said the Treasury could find the money to avoid cutting lone parent benefit by closing tax loopholes allowing offshore trusts, in a gibe at Geoffrey Robinson, the Treasury minister.

John Townend, Tory leader of the right-wing 92 Group, told Mr Blair: "You say 'put your trust in me'. But your ministers put their trust offshore."

The Prime Minister's words failed to quell the backbench rebellion as Harriet Harman, the

Social Security Secretary, faced a sustained attack from her own side. Ken Livingstone said he was voting against the Government regardless of the consequences, because lone parents who were meeting in the Commons felt "betrayed".

Ministers were also attacked by Audrey Wise, the veteran Labour MP for Preston, who led the first Commons motion calling on the Government to think again.

"What we are facing is the abolition of all lone parent premiums, for those who are out of work and those who are at work - and the biggest cut of all for those who are at work on low pay."

"I don't see that as a strategy for encouraging people to go to work. I believe the Secretary of State (Ms Harman) was right when she said these are disincentives," said Ms Wise.

HOW CUTS WILL BITE

- The Bill would abolish the higher rate of child benefit for new lone-parent claimants from next April.
- There are currently about 1.6 million lone parents, with about 2.5 million children.
- The Government is also introducing parallel cuts in Income Support, Job Seekers' Allowance, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit for all new lone-parent claimants, which mean overall benefit cuts for new claimants of between £4.95 to £10.25 a week, compared with current claimants.
- It is estimated that there will be a saving to the Treasury overall of £50m in the first year, 1998-99, which will rise to £150m in the third year.

"There is no sense at all in saying, in answer to our criticisms, 'Well, it's all right, we want these parents to go to work.' They will still lose £6.05."

"Then we're told, 'It's all right, existing claimants will be protected, it only applies to new claimants.'"

"Well, I have news for the minister. New claimants are people too," she added.

A Labour backbencher who defended the cut, Patricia Hewitt, former head of the think-tank the Institute for Public Policy Research, was interrupted by Labour MPs opposed to the cut. She was told by Lynne Jones, the Labour MP for Birmingham Selly Oak, who led the rebel amendment to the social security Bill, that the Government had been elected on a slogan of "things are going to get better - not things are going to get better except for lone parents".

Some Labour MPs who had resigned as ministerial aides earlier in the day looked on as she said: "Much as I would like to accept the argument that lone parent premium is an effective work incentive, it is hard to sustain that argument when the reality is that in this country we have fewer lone mothers in part time or full time jobs than in any other country in the European Union."

Opening the attack for the Liberal Democrats, Steve Webb said the proposal to revoke the higher rate of child benefit for lone parents would fulfil former Tory Social Security Secretary Peter Lilley's "dream".

"I ask what possible justification there can be for cutting benefits from working lone parents?" Mr Webb said.

The move would save about £5 million - a "drop in the ocean" for the Department of Social Security, which spent such a sum every 25 minutes, he said.



Single-minded: Women protesting outside Parliament yesterday as MPs prepared to vote on mothers' benefits

Photograph: David Rose

'What's the point working if my child suffers?'

Bringing up Sam is a full-time job for Ruth Glover, 19, and, what's more, it is one that she wants to do. Labour claims that getting single mothers like her into work will improve their quality of life. But, as she told Clare Garner, life would be worse both for herself and her son.

"It's unbelievable," said Miss Glover, as she listened to Labour MP Austin Mitchell defending his decision to ab-

stain last night's vote on single mothers' benefits. "I mean, I would hope that people who go into politics do so as individuals and because they really care about issue and are prepared to speak out about them." Miss Glover, from Camden, north London, had come to Westminster with her nine-month-old son to lend her support to the Single Mothers' Self-Defence campaign.

"I'm a mother as far as I'm concerned and that is work," she said. "I'm up at six or seven o'clock. It's longer hours than any other job you could possibly do. It's like being on call all the time."

Miss Glover believes that she can do a better job of raising Sam than anyone else. "He had to have major heart surgery after he was born, which they say causes babies to be much more miserable, but he is a very smelly baby and not particularly miserable. I feel sure that is because I've put that time into him."

It is not that she never wants to have a job outside the home. In fact, she hopes to go into nursing in due course. But "if Sam seems to be suffering I want the choice. What's the point in getting a job and caring for other people if my own child is suffering in that

process?" she said. For the time being, she wants to concentrate her efforts on raising Sam without being labelled a lazy scrounger.

When she voted Labour in the last election she had hoped such attitudes would change, but now she's feeling "disappointed with the lot of them."

"This just seems like penalising the people who really need help - penalising children as well as mothers," she said. Even if she did want to work, the astronomical cost of child care would mean she would not be any better off. The average cost of childcare in north London is, she says,

£650 a month and while there are council crèches for £65 a week, spaces are limited and there are only two days a year on which to apply.

Miss Glover believes the implications of Labour's policy are worrying in the long term. "In society there's so much anti-social behaviour, crime and depression, and a lot of this is probably coming from people who are living in poverty," she said. "It's so clichéd, but our children are our future and that's just a fact. If they aren't getting off to a good start it doesn't say much about the future of the country in general."

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Prisoners at a women's jail conducted a reign of terror, leaving staff afraid for their own safety, according to a report published yesterday.

Over the past year there was a series of "serious incidents" - including vicious gang fights between inmates - at Bullwood Hall in Essex, said the Chief Inspector of Prisons, Sir David Ramsbotham. In a scathing inspection report he also said he was "shocked" to learn that a male officer was forced to leave the Prison Service after allegations that he sexually assaulted a woman inmate in the segregation unit.

A Prison Service spokesman said the incident was investigated by police but no charges were brought.

Sir David said he was so concerned by conditions at Bullwood Hall - which the Prison Service has declared to be in need of special managerial attention - that he would conduct a follow-up inspection next year. Incidents at the jail had included assaults on staff and other prisoners, at least two gang fights, cell fires, two passive demonstrations over the amount of time spent inmates locked up in cells, and at least one suspected sexual assault by women on other prisoners as part of the illegal drugs trade.



Personal medical information stored on the growing NHS computer network may fall into the wrong hands. *Jeremy Laurance, Health Editor, looks at new moves to protect medical records.*

The director of a private health care organisation in the United States obtained a list of cancer patients from the computer database. As he was also a director of a local bank he was able to match the information with the list of outstanding bank loans so that he could call the patients in before they died.

Yesterday, Sir Kenneth Calman, the government's Chief Medical Officer, said the case offered a warning of what could happen if medical information

were not secured. Speaking at the launch of a report on the protection of medical records he said the growth of computer networks meant more people had access to the information and there were greater risks that it could be misused.

He added: "That is a terrible example of the things that might happen. We must reduce that risk to an absolute minimum. We all have a right to have our personal information treated confidentially."

The report, *Review of Patient-Identifiable Information*, marks the end of a five-year row between the Department of Health and the British Medical Association which had urged doctors to boycott the NHS-wide net, linking computers in GPs' surgeries, hospitals and health authorities.

Dr Sandy Macara, the BMA's chairman, said there could be no guarantee that the

American case could not happen here as things stood but there was now a joint determination to do something about it. "The problem was our lack of confidence in the NHS executive. We are not saying everything is now in place, but we are working to put measures in place. There is now agreement on what needs to be done."

However, Simon Davies, a lecturer in information technology at the London School of Economics and a former adviser to the BMA, said the centralisation of data on the NHS net would create a "hacker's smorgasbord."

The net started on 1 April, 1996, but was relaunched on Tuesday as part of the NHS White Paper reforms with a promise that patients would get test results quicker and could book hospital outpatient appointments before leaving the surgery.

The High Court yesterday reserved judgment on a "last chance" bid by Myra Hindley, the Moors murderer, to overturn the decision that she must die in prison.

for this applicant." Hindley, 55, has served 31 years since she was jailed in 1966 as Ian Brady's co-accused in the murders of Lesley-Ann Downey, 10, and Edward Evans, 17.

Lord Bingham, the Lord Chief Justice, sitting with Mr Justice Hooper and Mr Justice Astill, said the court hoped to give its ruling before the end of next week.

Her lawyers are challenging a decision of the former home secretary, Michael Howard, earlier this year - upheld recently by his successor, Jack Straw - to confirm the increase of a provisional 30-year minimum sentence imposed in 1985 to a "whole life" sentence.

Jumping toad

by I Jorman MacCaig

*Under the broad flat stone
was a metropolis of ants. By its edge
a toad sat, looking benign and grandmotherly -
it only needed specs.*

*Suddenly it floppily jumped,
little amateur – and swallowed
an ant that had left its home town.*

*The toad caught my eye with a look that said
You didn't think I had it in me, did you?*

*And I, dumbfounded, went off
whistling Knees up, Mother Brown.*

This week's poems celebrate the work of the Edinburgh poet Norman MacCaig, who was born in the city in 1910 and died there in 1996. They come from his *Selected Poems*, edited by Douglas Dunn and recently published by Chatto & Windus (£8.99).

Stephen Goodwin

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**Jobs lost
Tube
pull-off'**

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'Jobs lost in Tube sell-off'

Up to half the employees on London's Tube service could 'be sacked by the private sector to make London Underground profitable, according to the Adam Smith Institute. The right-wing think-tank produced plans, in a document called "Underground Revolution", for "involving the private sector" in running the Tube service.

Avoiding the word "privatisation", the report's author, Kenneth Irvine, said a model would be the Manchester tram service - which is overseen by the public sector, but not run by it. Mr Irvine - the brains behind the privatisation of British Rail - says LU is "even less efficient than BR".

"I have no doubt private-sector management and marketing expertise would improve productivity and revenues. Just look at how successful the privatised rail companies have been," said Mr Irvine, who has made more than £1m in share options from the flotation of Prism - a rail operator.

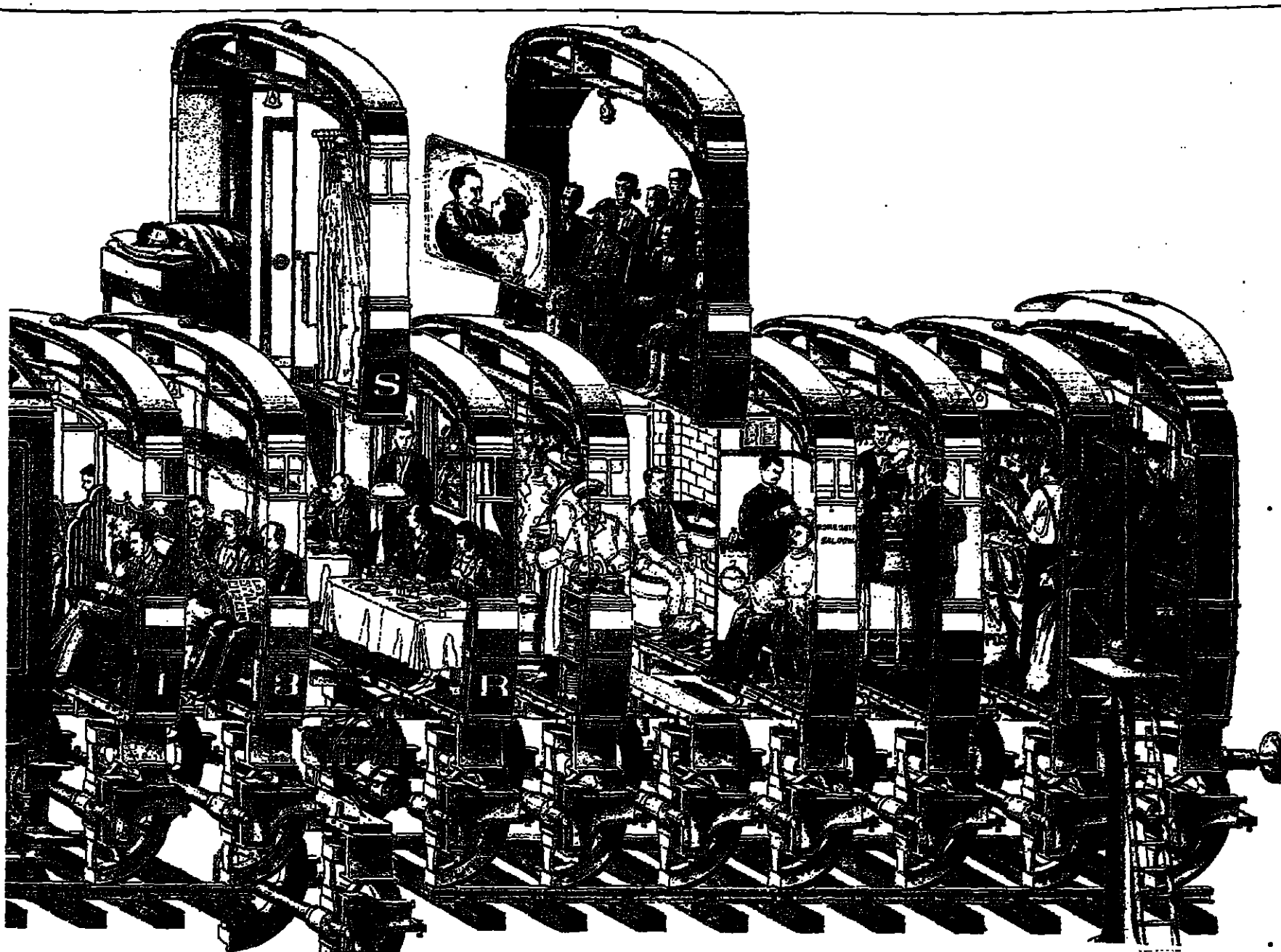
The institute's proposals would see the track, signalling and stations of Tube lines being bundled together and franchised to the private sector.

There are practical difficulties. Some lines, such as the new Victoria line, could be parcelled off as a single entity. But the Piccadilly and District line share both track, signals and an operations room. The "vertically integrated" companies would be taken over by private firms, which would be paid dwindling subsidies in order to upgrade the crumbling tunnels and poor track.

LU says there is an "investment backlog" of £1.2bn. In a leaked memorandum, the last government estimated that privatisation would net at least £1.2bn for the Treasury - but noted £600m would be required to upgrade the system.

Mr Irvine says extra money for investment could be raised by selling the Tube's ageing rolling stock. And he points out that by offering long-term subsidies the Government could spread payments over 20 years. "South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive has proposed the sale and lease back of its Supertram fleet to cover operational losses," said Mr Irvine. LU declined to comment, but a spokesman noted: "The Adam Smith Institute is often referred to as 'right wing'."

Randeep Ramesh



Golden age: The heyday of luxury rail travel was in the 1930s, when passengers enjoyed first-class meals, sleeping car accommodation, showers and novelties such as headsets, and even a hairdressing salon, as this exploded drawing of the Flying Scotsman shows. The Midland Main Line trains will be less commodious
Drawing: Dorling Kindersley

Comfort gripes soaring

Poor punctuality, reliability and information are rail passengers' biggest bugbears, according to latest complaint figures published yesterday.

Moans about overcrowding and comfort on trains have also soared, statistics from watchdog body the Central Rail Users' Consultative Committee showed.

The committee was giving more details following its announcement earlier this week that passenger complaints had risen to an all-time high in the July-September 1997 period.

Based on complaints it had received, the committee's statistics for July-September 1997 showed that:

- Complaints totalled 4,560 - a 96.1 per cent rise on the July-September 1996 figure;
- The highest number of complaints involved punctuality of trains;
- Moans about reliability and cancellations soared 226 per cent, while complaints about the national rail inquiry service rose 322 per cent;
- Complaints about the travelling environment and comfort on journeys rose by 128 per cent, while moans about information at stations was up 63 per cent;
- Complaints in dealing with correspondence and the quality of letters received from train operators soared 266 per cent.

The committee has not broken down the complaints into individual train companies. But the pressure group Save Our Railways revealed yesterday that complaints received by the two rail watchdog bodies covering South-east England totalled 2,551 for the period April-September 1997.

Save Our Railways' campaign director, Jonathan Bray, said that this compared with 2,474 received by the London Regional Passengers' Committee and the Rail Users' Consultative Committee for Southern England in the whole of the 1995-96 last year of British Rail-run services.

Railtrack review, page 22

Top class trains leave rest of us standing

Most rail travellers view taking the train as a chore, not a delight. But for those passengers prepared to pay, the ride is more smooth than rough. Randeep Ramesh explains why we may be seeing the age of two-tier train travel.

train company decided it was not appealing to enough travellers. The new Business Class will see passengers get "at-service food and drink", complimentary newspapers and 40 per cent more space to relax in.

More room for business travellers means less space for the ordinary punter. The MML trains take eight carriages. Two are usually used for first-class seats, but this could rise to four with the start of the new service in January, leaving fewer seats for those paying standard fares.

The new service will also offer those that pay 40 per cent more room to relax in. But travelling business class costs. London to Sheffield costs £79 - more than three times the cheapest tickets.

The future of rail travel appears to be populated by upper-

class and lower-class fares. Rail companies need to entice more passengers with expensive marketing wheezes and need to increase fares to pay for them.

First-class travellers next year on the Heathrow Express will pay nearly £20 for a 15-minute trip from Paddington station to the airport. On board, the well-heeled travellers will find televisions and plush seating.

"We are aiming at the business traveller; this is not a mode of mass transport," says Jeremy Job, marketing director of the Heathrow Express.

Other companies also have ambitious plans for luxury train travel. Great North Eastern Railways, which runs the high-speed east coast line, has proposals to revive an up-market Motorail service, replete with a trolley service and cinema-style

screens. Richard Branson's new fleet of tilting trains will offer services similar to those found on his aeroplanes' "Upper Class" cabins - including massages and video games.

While the well-heeled get to sample the good life, passengers with lighter wallets are unlikely to see much change. Many commuter lines still use slam-door rolling stock from the

1950s and with no new trains yet on the tracks, overcrowding will get worse. According to the latest figures from the Central Rail Users' Consultative Committee, complaints about the travelling environment and comfort on journeys rose by 128 per cent.

In fact, the rail network is likely to go back to the future. In the Victorian era, the railways

carried the bourgeoisie in sumptuous surroundings. It was not unusual to find showers, cocktail bars and fine restaurants in first-class carriages. The American banker JP Morgan even had a carriage for a barber's shop. The poor had to make do with the "under class": little more than cattle trucks with benches.

THE INDEPENDENT

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THE INDEPENDENT
THURSDAY 11 DECEMBER 1997
11

Marathon talks put US to the test



The big sleep: The interminable discussion of the treaty's small print eventually proved too much for some delegates

Photograph: Katsumi Kasahara/AP

If the world's wealthy countries are serious about complying with the Kyoto climate treaty, big changes are ahead in the way they use energy. No country, says Nicholas Schoon, Environment Correspondent, faces a bigger challenge than the United States.

The gas-guzzling era is coming to an end for the United States, the world's biggest climate-change polluter in both absolute and per capita terms. Either that, or President Clinton has no intention of honouring commitments made in Japan.

America's emissions have been rising steadily through the 1990s. The White House says that if policies do not change, by 2010, US output of greenhouse gases would be nearly 30 per cent higher than in the treaty's baseline year of 1990. Instead, the US is now expected to cut emissions by some 6 per cent under the protocol. That means a raft of new policies and projects to save energy and generate pollution-free electricity in order to meet the commitment.

But the US is planning to make some of the emission cuts outside its own borders, using the new pollution trading and

swapping regimes for which the treaty provides.

Britain and the European Union find themselves in a much easier position. The EU had been pitching for an ambitious 15 per cent cut between 1990 and 2010, while the UK's new Government had a manifesto commitment to cut carbon dioxide, the most important greenhouse gas, by 20 per cent over that period. Now, under the new treaty, neither the EU nor the UK have any legal obligation to deliver anywhere near such

deep cuts. But Britain's environmental groups will be urging the Government to stick to its target, continuing to show world leadership in cutting emissions. If the UK did, that would open the possibility of Britain selling pollution allowances to the USA, worth millions of dollars.

The Kyoto protocol provides several ways in which nations can collaborate to cut greenhouse gases. Industrialised countries are allowed to claim some of their reductions by supporting projects in Third World

nations which enable them to produce less climate pollution than they would otherwise. For example, the US might provide the extra finance needed to build a "green", low-pollution power station in India, instead of a cheaper, highly polluting coal-fired one.

The US would then be able to claim the emissions saved as its own. But to do so, it would have to obtain a certificate proving this swap was a genuine one which really did curb pollution. Part of the fee paid for the certificate would go into a new "clean development mechanism", which would help Third World nations adapt to the impacts of changing climate and rising sea levels.

There is also scope for developed countries to trade in greenhouse gas quotas. A nation that cut emissions below its treaty target could bank up a pollution credit and then sell it, as quotas, to a country which found itself unable to meet its commitment. By buying the quotas it would avoid breaching the treaty. Much of the detail still has to be thrashed out at future meetings.

Throughout the talks, the EU, Third World and environmentalists have been suspicious of such provisions. But the US has insisted, and these have been the price for getting it to agree to a much deeper cut than it originally offered. Now the big question is whether the Senate will ever ratify the treaty. If it doesn't, the Kyoto protocol is sunk.

PRESCOTT TAKES A LEADING ROLE

John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister and head of the British delegation, has suffered many irritations this week, but one in particular has been outstanding. It reached its climax yesterday, at a meeting of EU ministers, which was being interrupted by the constant trilling of mobile phones. The chairman of the meeting, the Luxembourg environment minister, appeared unbothered by the commotion. According to one present, it was left to Mr Prescott to ask that they be switched off, in language rarely heard in ministerial conclaves.

Mr Prescott is no diplomat and seven months ago, piloting his battle bus during the

general election campaign he would have seemed an unlikely, and inexperienced green. But in the past two months, and this week in particular, he has played a significant role in the negotiation of the Kyoto protocol. In the run-up to Kyoto he made two round-the-world trips to consult with the key parties; after arriving in Japan at the weekend, his irascible leadership has prevailed.

As a member of the "troika" - the past, present and future holders of the European presidency - Britain was always going to play a significant part in negotiations on the EU's behalf in Kyoto. But for several reasons, Mr Prescott has extended that role.

Global Warming? Pah! Just give me some clean socks

SKETCH
BY RICHARD
LLOYD PARRY

Late the other night, as the clock ticked on the Kyoto environment conference, a ghastly rumour began to spread among the 9,000-odd delegates, journalists and green campaigners. It was not that the conference might fall apart (although that was a distinct possibility), or that the agreement would be watered down (everyone knew it would be).

The awful possibility, which spread a frisson of fear through the meeting rooms and negotiating huddles, was that instead of ending as scheduled last night, the conference was going to continue until today, or even tomorrow. Global warming, rising oceans, malaria epidemics and skin cancer suddenly paled into insignificance. Nothing, nothing, could be worse than another day of this.

Future generations may or may not look back on the Kyoto conference as a historic moment when the nations of the world put aside greed and self-interest for the sake of their unborn grandchildren. Those of us who were present will remember it for very different reasons - as a tedious, migraine-inducing waste of time, an orgy of dismal food, pompous rhetoric, short tempers, and bad jokes.

Several things have made the conference nearly unbearable, first among them its setting - the Kyoto International Conference Hall (Kich). Reports from Kyoto have all described the city as Japan's "ancient capital", a Shangri-la of temples, palaces and exotic beauties in exquisite kimono. The truth is that since COP3 opened 10 days ago very few delegates have stepped beyond the grey portals of the Kich, a modernist concrete spaceship, appropriately pronounced "kitch". Instead of exploring the surrounding mountains, they have spent 10 days drinking cups of coffee and eating sandwiches containing cold pork cutlets (a Japanese favourite).

Kich is huge, but so is the conference and all week journalists, politicians and NGOs have trod on one another's toes with increasing grumpiness. John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister, lost his rag on Monday night after being kept waiting for an hour by the American delegation. Michael Meacher and several of his European counterparts narrowly escaped being crushed yesterday when a mob of cameramen almost knocked

down a temporary cubicle on their heads. Even the best-natured stunts have fallen victim to sense of humour failure. One green group mounted a wacky allegorical stunt involving members dressed as world leaders kicking around a ball representing the planet. But when an Italian journalist stole their globe, they called security and tried to have him chucked out.

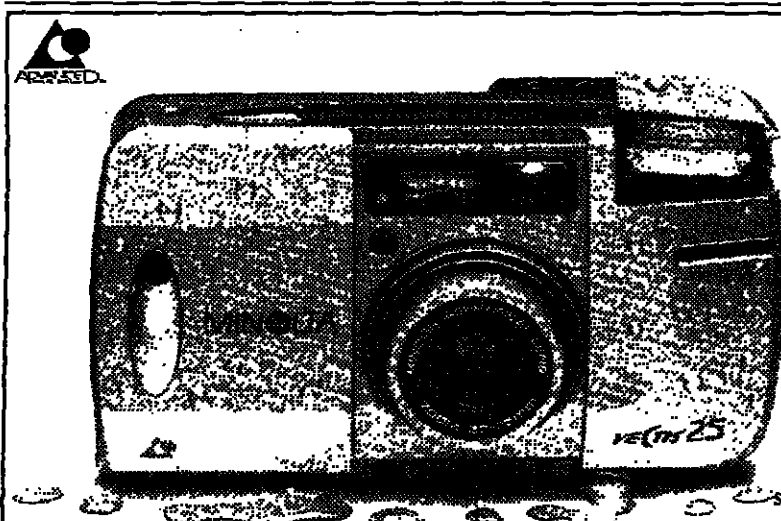
It is one measure of the conference's awfulness that a meeting of the some of the liveliest minds in the world has so far generated just one COP3 joke. Q. How many Americans does it take to change a light bulb? A. None. Free-market forces will change it all by themselves. Har-har-har.

If, like me, you failed to secure a hotel room the requisite three months before the conference your plight has been doubly wretched - 10 days dependent on the generosity of better-organised friends, with personal belongings scattered across various parts of the city, moving from place to place in unchanged shirt, reeking socks, and recycled underpants.

An average collection of conference literature fills one suitcase alone, but even the most disciplined delegates have been reduced to shuffling bag ladies, bent double under the weight of recycled paper press releases.

It is not even as if this effort and expense has fulfilled expectations. The situation was drolly summed up the other day by Raul Estrada-Oyuela, the Argentine roly-poly who revels in the title of chairman, Committee of the Whole. Goaded to distraction by the possibility of an extended conference, one journalist pinned him down: what, he begged, was the final deadline for the conference.

Mr Estrada tipped his head to one side and leant into the microphone: "The deadline? It is the end of the world, no?"



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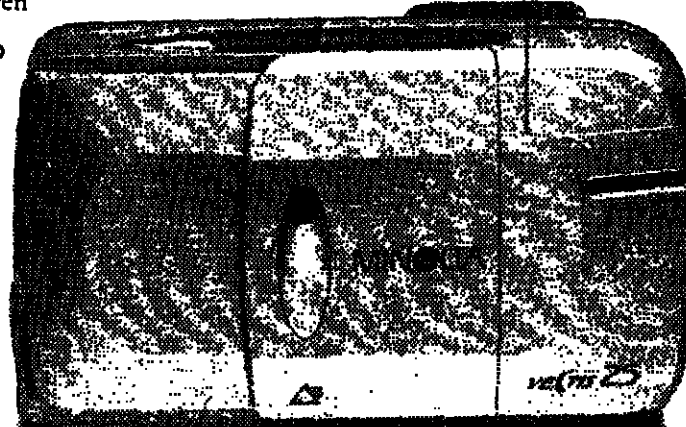


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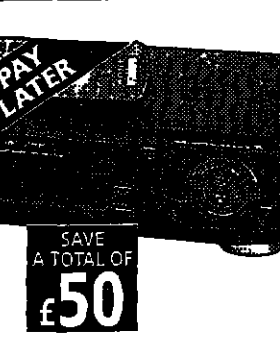


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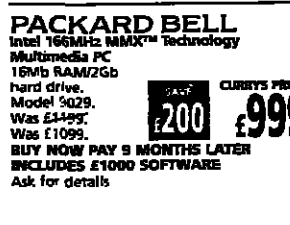
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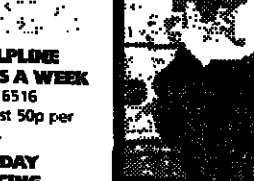
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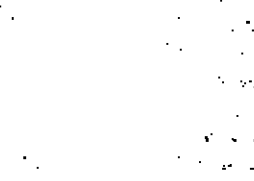
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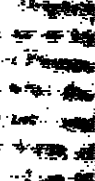
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Blair goes in to bat against the Euro XI

Tony Blair goes to an EU summit in Luxembourg tomorrow to fight Britain's relegation to an EU second division through exclusion from Euro-X, a new club for members of the single currency. Compromise is in the air. But Katherine Butler says a face-saving summit deal will not rescue Britain from the political margins once the euro is launched.

Diplomatic efforts will intensify today to avert a showdown at tomorrow's Luxembourg summit over Euro-X, the planned currency club which is likely to include all the EU's 15 members apart from Britain, Sweden, Greece and Denmark. Failure to patch up the first real rift between the new government and Britain's EU partners would be a serious defeat for Mr Blair which would expose Britain's marginalisation and mar the launch of its forthcoming EU presidency.

Despite insistence from Downing Street last night that Britain was still demanding full membership of the grouping, there were signs of compromise. French, German and European Commission officials were venturing to predict a deal can be done which will allay the fears of the four "outs" that they are being excluded from decision-making.

One possibility is a summit declaration that decisions, as opposed to debate, will remain in the hands of the EU Council of finance ministers - which includes Gordon Brown, the Chancellor. The four "outsiders" could meanwhile accept an invitation from the French and Germans to attend meetings of Euro-X when matters which affect them are being discussed.

Alternatively, the 11 "insiders" could agree to limit their private discussions to a short list of areas where they have a genuine need for confidentiality - for example, the exchange rate of the euro against other currencies, sanctions to be imposed on high-spending governments which flout budgetary discipline, and technical issues relating to the euro.

Excluding Britain from exchange-rate discussions is justified on grounds that Mr Brown does not have access to Bundesbank deliberations, even though the

value of the mark has a profound effect on sterling.

Agreement along these lines would require some compromise from the French, who have been leading calls for the remit of Euro X to extend to such areas as taxation and labour-market policies. It would also allow Mr Blair to emerge with some pride intact, climbing down from the high horse raised by Mr Brown while at the same time claiming he had seen off a direct threat to Britain's influence. Most of the "in" countries recognise that he needs a political figleaf and because this is Labour, not the Tories, they are happy to provide it.

What they are still not prepared to do is grant Britain and the others the automatic "voice at the table" or the right to block plans that Britain wants. French officials were adamant yesterday that there would be a two-tier structure. "There is little point in a body to link the Eurozone members if those not inside the currency can also attend," said one source.

The irony of any settlement which emerges at Luxembourg is that Mr Brown could have secured as good a result at the last meeting of EU finance ministers in Brussels 10 days ago. He was offered an "ear at the door," a guaranteed flow of information, and that the new body would be rooted in EU structures which would have provided legal safeguards to the "outs".

EU diplomats say Mr Brown "overplayed his hand", by stubbornly sticking to his demands for "full participation" and issuing veiled threats that Britain would launch a "sandwich war", blocking the right of the "ins" to use EU catering facilities for their talks. The public spat he insisted on merely raised the profile of Euro-X, strengthened the resolve of the others and exposed in blunt terms the extent to which non-participation in EMU carries the price of political exclusion.

French talk of bedrooms and married couples not wanting intruders between the sheets may have strained the imagery but Britain's decision to rule out a decision on joining the Euro for now really does threaten to leave British ministers straining at the keyhole. What the row shows, ministers from other countries believe, is that Britain simply has not woken up to the reality of what a single monetary policy among 11 countries will entail.

Bosnia's leaders told to do their job or lose it

Bosnia's bickering leaders were given an ultimatum yesterday, ordering them to start governing their country or let the international community do it for them.

At the end of a two-day meeting in Bonn, representatives of 51 countries approved a document which came close to giving dictatorial powers to Carlos Westendorp, the chief co-ordinator in Bosnia.

"A clear signal has been sent from Bonn: the patience of the international community is not inexhaustible," declared Klaus Kinkel, the German foreign minister who hosted the Peace Implementation Conference.

Under the new rules, Mr Westendorp will be able to take

decisions that would normally be in the remit of the Bosnian government. He will thus design the country's car licence plates by the end of January, a task that has eluded the combined Croat, Serb and Muslim authorities so far.

The new policy is already making its effect felt. Under the aegis of the Bonn meeting, the leaders of the three communities were at last able to agree on the design of the Bosnian passport, and a new law defining citizenship.

Asked by journalists after the meeting whether Bosnia had now become an international "protectorate", Mr Kinkel said "no", while Mr Westendorp, revealingly, answered "not yet".

Mr Westendorp, whose official title is "High Representative", served notice that he now expected the former warring parties to start co-operating with the international court in The Hague, to build a police force, and to clamp down on corruption.

At the insistence of Robin Cook, the British Foreign Secretary, and the US representative, Strobe Talbott, the final document also deplored "escalating ethnic tensions" in the Yugoslav province of Kosovo. The Yugoslav delegation responded to the call for a dialogue between Belgrade and Kosovo's Albanian population by storming out of the conference.

— Imre Karacs, Bonn



A cake prepared for Hitler's 55th birthday on 20 April 1944. Officers still celebrate the day

Photograph: The Death of Hitler, Richard Cohen Books

German army officers still loyal to Nazis

As the trickle of scandals swells into a flood, Germany's Defence Minister calls for an independent inquiry into the armed forces. An investigation is likely to draw disturbing conclusions about the state of the Bundeswehr, reports Imre Karacs from Bonn.

"We have made mistakes," admitted Volker Rühle, the embattled Defence Minister, at yet another impromptu public appearance yesterday. The biggest of these, it now appears, was to underestimate the extent of neo-Nazi contamination in the Bundeswehr.

On Monday, Mr Rühle stubbornly held his line, refusing to sanction an inquiry on the grounds that scandal num-

ber four was just another "isolated incident". Yesterday's post brought revelations of neo-Nazi mayhem at two more barracks, plus video evidence at a third.

The coup de grâce is coming today. The cover story of Stern magazine this morning will feature the lads of the Franz-Josef-Strauss barracks in the Bavarian town of Albstadt, training centre for an elite parachute regiment.

According to Stern, the barracks regularly celebrated Hitler's birthday, the anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War, as well as their famous predecessors' landing on Crete. The magazine carries pictures of soldiers posing in front of a portrait of Hitler and the Nazi swastika-flag.

At these festive events, the parades are reported to have entertained themselves listening to the Horst Wessel song, speeches by Hitler and

Goebbels, and watching a Nazi propaganda film about Jews. A former officer at Albstadt claims the training centre was imbued with the "military traditions of the Third Reich", including mementoes of the last war.

The pictures and the story date back to 1993. A year later some paras clashed with a group of foreigners in a local club. A few weeks after that incident, the then commander summed up the local esprit de corps as follows: "The German paratrooper asks no questions; he acts."

"It was clear to me, that some of our superiors wanted to instill in us young soldiers the traditions of the Wehrmacht," one former trainee told Stern. He spoke of one officer keeping SS regalia and a volume of Hitler's Mein Kampf in his room.

How much of this was condoned by senior officers will

only be known when the "isolated incidents" are investigated. But according to a professor teaching at the "Bundeswehr university", even the officer corps is not immune to political extremism. Prof Wolfgang Gesserharter told the weekly Die Zeit that 20 per cent of applicants to the university showed "nationalist-conservative" tendencies.

A proper breakdown to discover the percentage of Nazi sympathisers did not exist, because Minister Rühle had vetoed such a study.

But since the beginning of this week, it is known that up to 30 staff at the army's most prestigious academy were unhealthily preoccupied with the lost lands of East Prussia, and were stupid enough to allow themselves to be lectured by a neo-Nazi terrorist.

The affair of Manfred Roeder, the convicted neo-Nazi invited to the academy

and paid by the government to "re-Germanise" East Prussia, comes to a head today.

Parliament is due to debate the role played by the defence and foreign ministries, which are predictably pointing the finger at one another.

Mr Rühle's position appears untenable. The army, blaming him for years of "upheaval", wants him out.

A retired four-star general broke ranks yesterday and launched a withering attack, accusing the minister of "surrounding himself with yes-men" and of being unable to tolerate independent thinkers.

The opposition parties are also assembling together a lynch-party.

It was Mr Rühle, they point out, who, together with Chancellor Helmut Kohl, had tried to instill a sense of patriotism in the armed forces. In that, the minister seems to have over-shot his target.

Marijuana sent to French MPs

A group advocating the decriminalisation of marijuana said yesterday that it had sent a hand-rolled marijuana cigarette to every French MP along with letters urging them to ease France's tough drug laws.

"This legislation, the most repressive in Europe, has done nothing to halt the massive spread of drugs, nor has it slowed the appetite of a certain number of our fellow citizens for

illegal substances," the Paris-based Collective for Information and Research on Cannabis (CIRC) wrote.

A spokesman said the joints, made from marijuana grown in France, had been mailed on Tuesday afternoon. National Assembly deputies differed sharply in their reactions to the gifts, although none said they intended to smoke them.

— Reuters, Paris

Nato base in Sicily gave contracts to Mafia

Warrants have been issued for 21 suspects who allegedly worked to ensure that millions of dollars in contracts for a Nato air base would go to companies controlled by the Mafia, authorities said yesterday.

Among the suspects was Benedetto Santapaola, an imprisoned convicted mob boss considered the Mafia's number one in eastern Sicily. Investigators believe many bosses

manage to run their affairs even from behind bars.

Two suspected bosses from Santapaola's clan were among those arrested, authorities said.

No US citizens were involved, but a British citizen working at Sigonella air base, identified by officials at DIA, the Italian anti-Mafia investigative unit, as Raymond Watkins of Bristol, was among the suspects.

Sicilian businessmen were also named in warrants for their alleged role in the scheme, including lending their "clean" names to serve as officials of front companies for the Mafia.

Thanks to information from some of the suspects, bidders from the Mafia-linked companies were able to learn what competitors were bidding and thus deliver the lowest bid.

— AP Catania

'Mad-cow' doctor rewarded with a Nobel prize

A doctor whose work illuminated a cause of dementia, and a playwright whose characters act demented to shine light on social concerns joined eight others in receiving Nobel prizes last night. The laureates in literature, physics, chemistry, medicine and economics accepted their prizes from Sweden's King Carl XVI Gustaf in a ceremony at Stockholm's Concert Hall.

Instead of providing a prepared text, the literature prize winner, Dario Fo, gave the audience sheaves of brightly coloured drawings which referred to the main ideas in his extemporised talk. The medicine prize goes to Stanley Prusiner, of the University of California-San Francisco, who discovered the infectious agent behind "mad-cow disease" and other brain-wasting afflictions that include a rare form of dementia in humans. The Nobel Prizes are presented on 10 December, the anniversary of the death of Alfred Nobel, whose will established the awards.

Havel set for new term President Vaclav Havel accepted the backing by representatives of four parties for a second five-year term. The 61-year-old president's current term is ending as the Czech Republic faces a period of political instability unprecedented in its eight-year transition from communism.

Senator sentenced over calls

An elderly French senator was handed a three-month suspended jail term for making insulting telephone calls to constituents, threatening to burn their houses or kill them.

Senator Kleber Malecot, 82, was convicted by a Paris court

of making the calls in 1992 when he was mayor of the central town of Neuville-les-Bois.

A member of the rightist Union for French Democracy, he denied making the calls and insisted he was the victim of a political plot.

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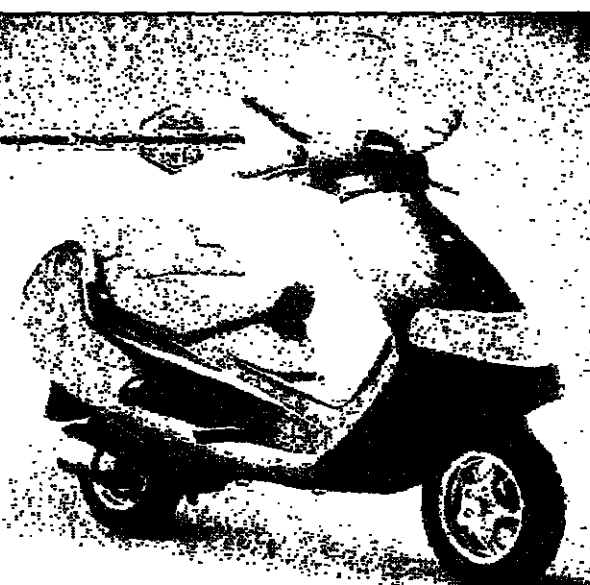
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He may, indeed, have a viral infection. He may also be exhausted. Persistent ill health and the burdens of office have aged the 66-year-old Mr Yeatsin prematurely. He remains an obsessive man who either hurls himself into his work or withdraws to brood in private, detached and depressed. This year, the former condition has largely prevailed.

the city which are outside the municipal boundaries. The Palestinian Authority is conducting a census of the 1.5 million Palestinians who live on the West Bank and 900,000 who live in Gaza. Despite his intransigence on Jerusalem, Mr Netanyahu is reported secretly to have frozen the next stage of construction at Har Homa, the Jewish neighbourhood planned for the outskirts of the city. The US is pressing Israel to quit at least 12 per cent of the West Bank in the next stage of the Israeli pull-out.

— Patrick Cockburn, Jerusalem

Off the menu: Chicochima, a young chimp in an Israeli zoo with her new-born baby, is safe from the poachers

—AP, Nairobi



The Palestine Liberation Organisation will have to continue to make do with the observer status first granted to it in 1974.

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Bogeyman who can still terrorise from the witness box



Icon of fear: The face of Carlos the Jackal - with the dark glasses that became almost a trademark - used on the cover of the Black Grape album *It's Great When You're Straight ... Yeah!*

The face became an icon of the 1970s, but 'Carlos the Jackal' has rarely been seen in public before. Tomorrow in Paris, the Jackal - Ilich Ramirez-Sanchez, the most celebrated terrorist of all time - goes on trial. John Lichfield writes from Paris that he may yet have a few surprises to spring.

Carlos is 48 now, paunchier than ever and exhausted by more than three years of solitary confinement in a French jail. In his rare up-to-date pictures, he resembles the Venezuelan businessman he might have been, like his two brothers Lenin and Vladimir. Instead, he invented a new trade: "professional international terrorist".

It was Ramirez-Sanchez who shot and wounded Joseph Sieff, president of Marks and Spencer in St John's Wood in 1973; it was Ramirez-Sanchez, by then known as Carlos, who led the kidnapping of 10 Opec oil ministers in Vienna in December 1975; it was Carlos who orchestrated a score of attacks for Soviet bloc governments in the late 1970s and 1980s (but nothing like as many as he was credited with).

The Soviet empire collapsed; Carlos became an embarrassment to the leaders of the Palestinian cause which he had passionately (or cynically?)



The aftermath on the raid at the Opec meeting in 1975: Two newly-released hostages comfort each other

espoused. In 1994 he was "sold" to the French government by his Sudanese hosts, in return for unspecified political favours.

Why did the French want him so desperately after all those years? Partly, it was a political coup ahead of the 1995 presidential election. Partly, the French security services had a personal score to settle: the murder in Paris in June 1975 of two officers of the DST, the internal security service.

Other trials are expected to follow but it is for these murders that Ramirez-Sanchez will stand trial in Paris from tomorrow. Jury selection begins today.

The fact that there will be a jury, which is unusual in terrorist cases in France, is telling. The terror network which Carlos ran, with connections in Japan, Germany and the Middle East, is history. He does not scare people any more; not physically. But he may still be capable of causing severe embarrassment, especially to the French government which captured him.

Ramirez-Sanchez and his 29 lawyers say that he plans to use the trial to reveal the secrets of his trade-offs with western governments in the 1980s. "He's going to say things which will hurt," says one of his

leading lawyers, Isabelle Coutant-Peyre.

Maybe. Other than the silk shirts and cigars sent from his doting family in Venezuela, one of Ramirez-Sanchez's remaining pleasures is to tie lawyers in knots of sophistry. It is said that none of his legal team, all of whom are giving their services for free, knows who will play the principal role in the trial.

Ilich Ramirez-Sanchez was born in Venezuela in October 1949. His father, a successful lawyer, was a committed Marxist-Leninist (hence the names given to his sons). According to one version of his life, Ilich was trained as an international terrorist as a teenager in Cuba in the late 1960s; according to another version, he was a political dilettante - part radical, part playboy - until he discovered the Palestinian cause in 1970.

What truly drove Carlos remains a mystery. Although a self-appointed agent of the oppressed, he was partial to luxury throughout his career.

In an book based on French trial documents and East German records - *Carlos*, by Bernard Violet - one of his French lawyers insists that his client is a true Latin American revolutionary. "Through him, you can imagine what Che must have been like, or the early Fidel Castro."

Another of his lawyers, quoted at length by *Le Figaro*, was less impressed: "He's finished, a beaten man. All that he's got left is this rather desperate, kind of judicial, guerrilla warfare. It's his last manipulation."

FREEDOM FIGHTERS OR TERRORISTS? THE SHADOWY FIGURES WHO DEALT IN DEATH AND DESTRUCTION

Carlos the Jackal is not alone with his fame. There are others whose dedication to violence has gained them an almost equally high profile worldwide. Some are now dead, others are still on the run, others live quietly respectable lives.

Of all terrorists dead or alive, Abu Nidal is the most feared. He has become synonymous with the concept of a shadowy terrorist mastermind. All photographs are long out of date, and few facts about him are entirely undisputed. He has been implicated

in dozens of terrorist attacks in the past 20 years, including attacks on Rome and Vienna airports in which 17 people died and an attack on a Greek ferry in which 11 people died.

He was born in Jaffa in 1937, and was ambassador for Yasser Arafat's PLO in Sudan and Iraq. But in 1973 he quarrelled with the PLO, saying it was too moderate. He has threatened to kill Mr Arafat, and was responsible for killing two of Mr Arafat's senior aides in 1990. He is re-

portedly based in Libya, though it is unclear whether he has freedom of movement there. According to some reports, he has been ill with cancer.

Almost equally well known in her day was Leila Khaled, who twice hijacked planes on behalf of the Palestinian cause. She now lives in Jordan, a 53-year-old mother with teenage sons. But she remains true to her convictions, insisting that she was a freedom fighter not a terrorist, and that the hijacks were the only way to draw

attention to the Palestinian cause. A hijack attempt on an El Al aircraft in 1970 ended with her colleague shot dead, and with Khaled arrested in the UK. But she was released after just a few weeks, in an exchange of seven captured Palestinians for 300 civilian hostages.

The most famous European terrorists in recent decades have been Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof, who jointly gave their names to the group that was at war with the West German state in the

1970s. For some, the Baader-Meinhof group were mindless terrorists; others argued that the group forced West Germany to confront its history. Baader and Meinhof died in prison in 1976 and 1977 respectively - suicides or convenient deaths, according to one's point of view. A number of lesser-known members of the Red Army Faction (an offshoot of Baader-Meinhof), are still on the run; they appear on "Wanted" posters all across Germany.

The word "terrorist" means different things to different people. All over the world, different groups advocate violence in order to get rid of what they perceive as illegitimate regimes at home. Increasingly, Western powers are taking a tough line against those who advocate violence in their home countries, however under democratic those countries may be. Egypt complains that Islamic radicals are at liberty in the UK. British legislation looks set to be tightened up, in the months to come.

— Steve Crowshaw

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With his gift for communication and his sure popular touch, it was the Democrat, Bill Clinton, who inherited Reagan's populist mantle. Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House of Representatives, who tried to snatch it back with a bombastic speaking style and unashamedly right-wing policies, never quite lived up to expectations. He helped the Republicans win both Houses of Congress three years ago with his Pro-

Special relationship: Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher felt they had vanquished communism, now the former US president is vast becoming a legend

But it was the salt-of-the-earth Reaganites who were most dismissive. If public edifices were to be named after individuals who made America feel good, "where does one find the Robin Williams National Cathedral or the Barry Manilow turnpike?" wrote one correspondent to the *Washington Post*. Their view - to judge by the many who felt strongly enough to write to the newspapers or ring up the talkshows - is that Reagan needs no such monument. To name an airport after him would be not only unnecessary, but demeaning.

In the minds of millions of Americans, his myth is already made. His eventual passing will only enhance it.

the former president interrupted his semi-retirement to star in a Pizza Hut advertisement, reportedly to raise money for his Moscow-based think tank, the Gorbachev Foundation. The commercial, shot in Moscow but for broadcast only outside Russia, reportedly shows enthusiastic fast foodies crying out: "Long Live Gorbachev, who brought us Pizza Hut!" At present, that is the only complement he can hope for, at least at home.



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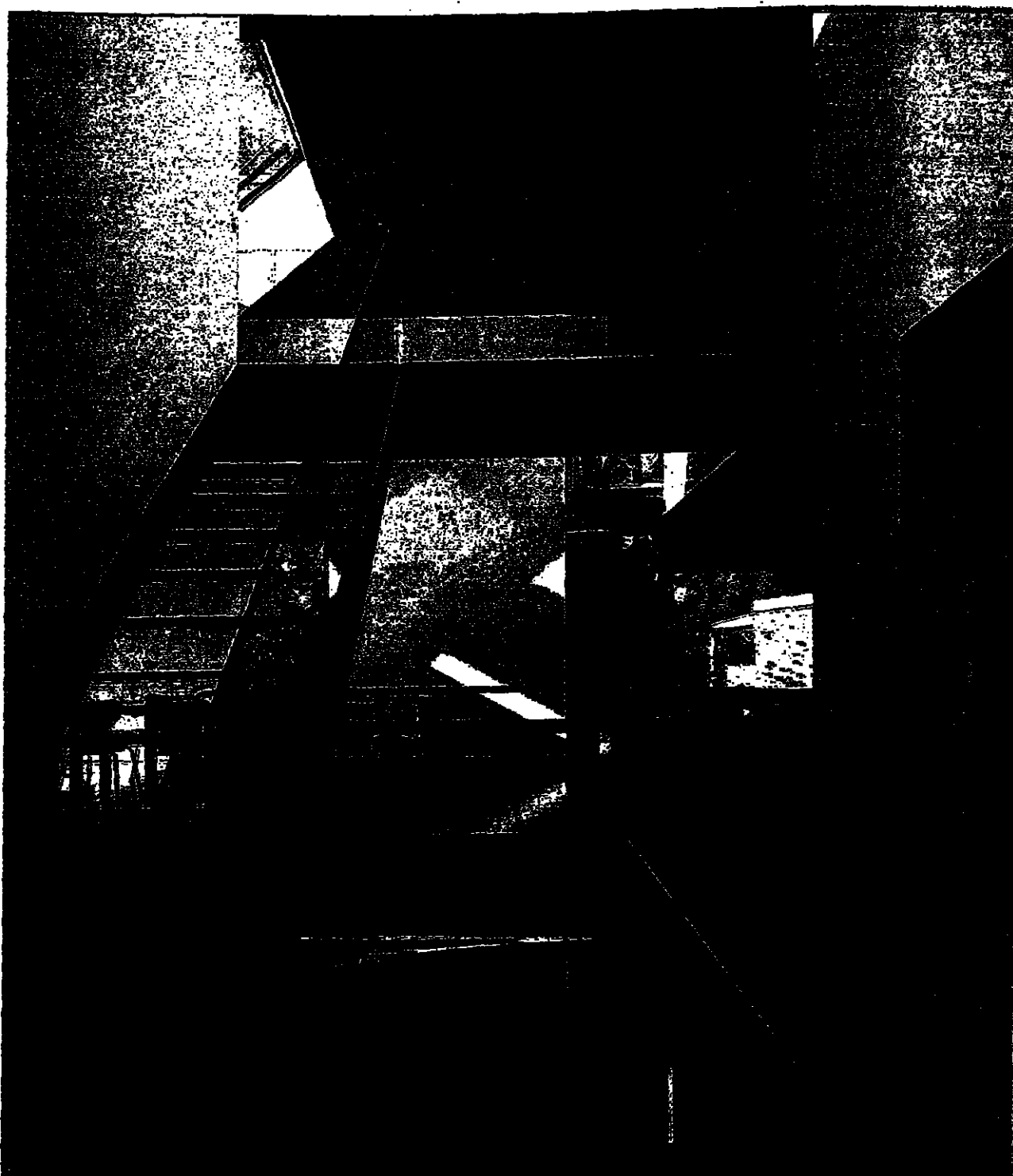
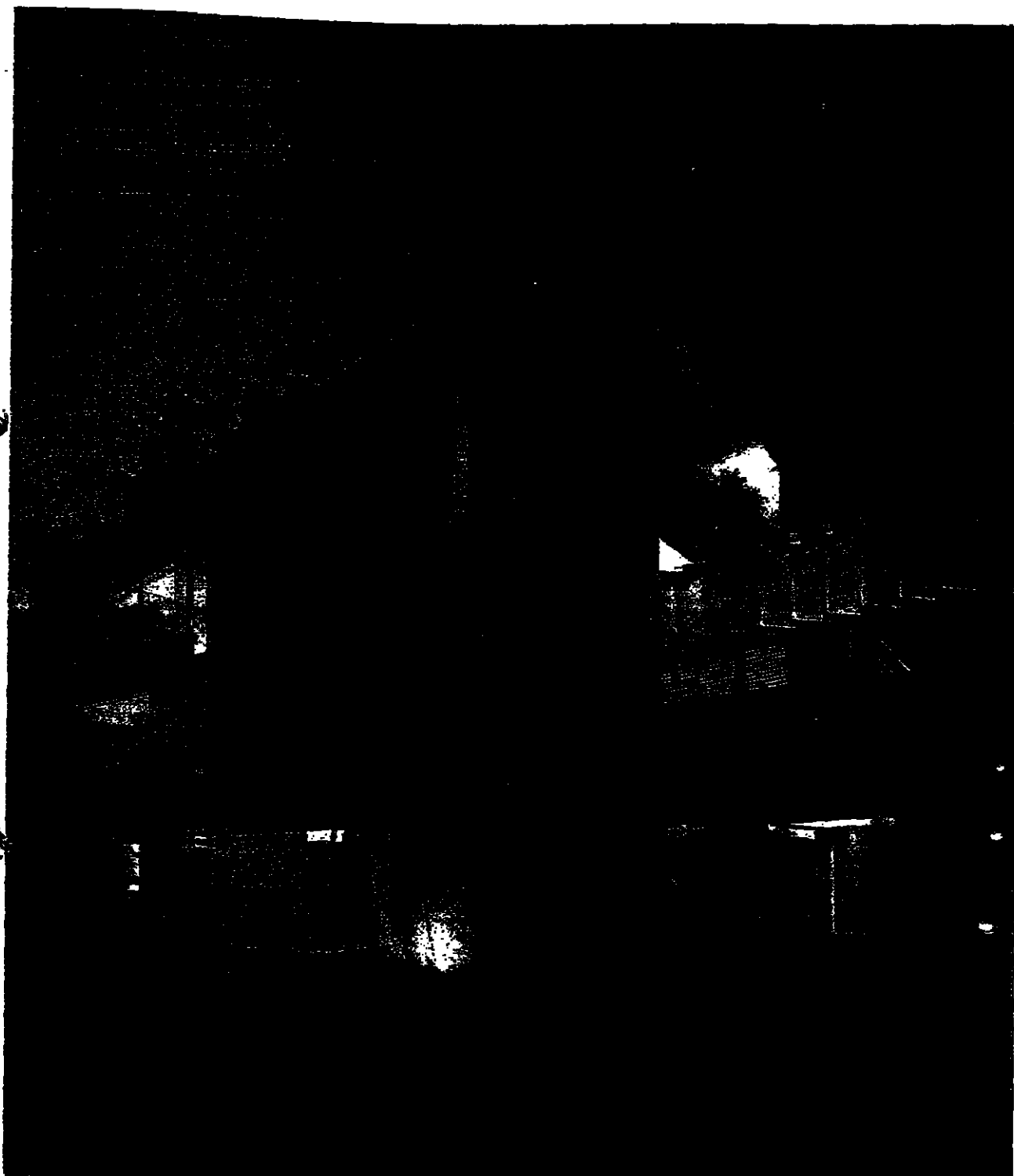
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The boundaries between inside and out blur in Rick Mather's award-winning house that turns its face to the wall when the view isn't so good and opens out to the garden when it is. A glass floor section lets light from the skylight above bathe the swimming pool (above right). The swimmers can gaze up to the clouds

Photos: Richard Bryant / Arcad

It's in London and it's a lovely white house on a hill (but not as you'd imagine it)

There's good news and bad news for modernists commissioned to bring exciting new houses to leafy Hampstead. One built his house and won a prize. The other, reports Nanie Nieswand, was cut off at the computer.

The London architect Rick Mather won an award of excellence from the American Institute of Architecture on Tuesday night for an angular, modern glass house in Hampstead.

Built on a steep slope, the house is actually on three levels - four counting the roof garden - with gardens on the lower two levels and the upper master bedroom suite opening on to a roof terrace. A roof light

beams natural light down through the core of the house, and rather than letting it stop dead at the living-room level, he inset into the floor a toughened glass slab 3m x 4m - "Sure you can walk on it, my client Hoovers it" - through which the light floods the swimming pool below. Sometimes the owners float in the pool looking up at the clouds.

"This is a house that can be enjoyed from a lot of different positions, without feeling like you're going into a barn," says Mather.

It is a very calculated building in its orientation which makes the most of the site, not just for the views and light but for ecological reasons. All Mather's buildings have an energy conscious programme built into them which he describes as "no big deal, not particularly technological but good common

sense". The only architect to design student accommodation at the University of East Anglia which has no central heating yet stays warm through winter - and has a waiting list, it's so popular - Mather saves his scorn for a high-tech approach which uses energy-saving technology to make up for a loss elsewhere. "There's no point, for example, on a south-facing house putting photovoltaic solar cells on the roof to power the air conditioning." Instead, he super-insulates and ventilates houses. In this house, unwanted condensation from the pool heats the house via radiant panels underfloor. The pool is ozone treated, which means no chlorine smell. Rainwater is collected in a cistern in the garden for irrigation of the roof terraces, as London water lines up irrigation pipes. Atelier One helped with the structure and

Atelier Ten with the services and Doug McIntosh was his project architect.

Mather's hawk-eye for detail is very evident - there isn't even a glazing bar at the right angles of the windows. Etched glass slats angled like louvres on the terrace capture the garden view and the light, while screening out the less appealing bits of neighbouring houses. A low glass wall doubles as a wind shield on the roof terrace.

But clients, as Frank Lloyd Wright once memorably informed us, have to have somewhere "to eat, seat and sleep, confound them". So now the owners have called in an interior decorator, Chester Jones, ex Colefax & Fowler, to furnish the living space with his wife Sandy's rugs and a wooden bench and bookshelves. "There's lots of drama in this house," says the client. "And I was frozen, paralysed when I first moved in. My husband's a minimalist so he prefers not to hang anything on the wall but I wanted to warm it up a little. Just the open-plan living and dining area."

But at roughly the same time as Mather was receiving his prize, a brilliant, white shell house designed by Ron Arad to be built on a site also in Hampstead was vetoed by Haringey Council. Both sites are leafy streets full of period-piece houses

within walking distance of Hampstead Heath. But the residents confronting Arad's showmanship in their back yard were all up in arms at the idea of the new kid on the block, while Mather's are a friendly lot who all pitched up at the house-warming last Sunday. Both plots of land already had existing houses which had to be demolished to make way for the new-comers. Arad had to take out an undistinguished vaguely Arts and Crafts house. Mather a

It's enough to make the would-be residents of Arad's shell house want to sell their plot of land. But they are appealing to Haringey Council. Having read the planning officers' reports, Arad says the documentation which they presented to the planning committee was riddled with factual inaccuracies and created "an extremely misleading view both of our proposed new house and of the worth of the existing building". He is angered by the events.

"Haringey Council sent a clear message. While it is content to see the character and appearance of its conservation area eroded by over development, crass architecture and insensitive renovation and extension, it's not prepared to support architects or property owners that seek to improve its heritage." So maybe that familiar image of the shell house, first seen in August in *The Independent*, will make it off the computer screen and on to site one day. Let us hope so. Haringey Council hide their prejudices towards modern architecture behind their protection of a 1920s speculative building that even English Heritage could see no point in saving - and that they, at best, can describe only as "good enough". This isn't good enough. A review of planning committees is long over-due.

'There's a lot of drama in this house - I was frozen, paralysed when I first moved in'

Fifties garage with two flats for housekeeper and chauffeur who worked at an adjacent Georgian house with Lutyens additions. Planning permission had previously been given to a property speculator for a pair of neo-Georgian semis. But there the comparison stops. Arad had to win over Haringey. Mather had Camden Council.




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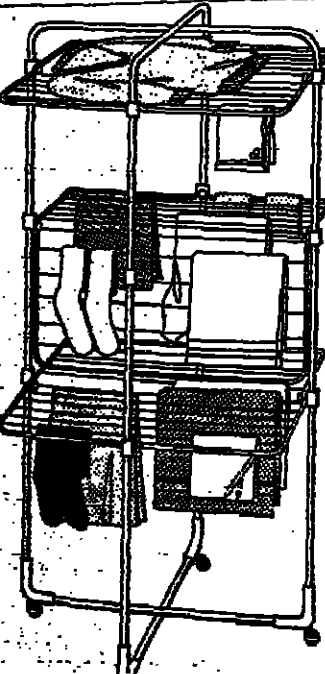
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@/+!=`!****!!! Road rage has got nothing on this ...

The advert promised the earth, the reality was a wonky PC and weeks spent trying to get some sense or satisfaction out of 'customer service'. Yes, Pru Irvine was in the grip of computer rage.

Road rage has nothing on this. This creeping hysteria transcends race, creed and colour and starts, I suspect, as you sign the standing order agreement.

To put the subject into context I should tell you how this came about. I was leafing through the newspapers when I came across a full-page ad saying, "I want it up and running".

"A top class PC on my desk as soon as possible. That's in days not weeks. I haven't got time to worry about installation. I need someone to take care of all that for me. Naturally, I want to order it over the phone and it's got to have the latest software. I also want a full on-site warranty backed up with technical support from people who really know (and care about) what they're doing ..."

And all that from the world's No 1 PC manufacturer - Compaq. I'll have that, I thought. It took about two weeks to arrive.

The fax didn't work and the keyboard made funny marks like a "U" when I wanted a "C" and so on. I phoned the help line because I've got a free year's customer service and support deal. Well, of course, it didn't work - the integrated fax, to be precise. I was pushed from department to department, from England to Scotland. The funny thing was that every time I talked to someone new they denied the existence of the last person I'd spoken to. Each and every one gave me their personal guarantee. It was decided I should have a replacement, but no one knew when. I explained, with the minimal amount of bile, that I'd missed a work deadline, was about to miss another and had spent almost a day on the telephone.

The man with the new machine arrived. When I suggested he test the fax, he threw his hands above his little chest: "More than my job's worth." He left, with the original machine still standing on the desk and the replacement still in its box. I can't tell you much more because I can feel the urge to slam the keyboard through the screen as the memory rekindles.

What I can tell you though is that computer rage is attacking people of all ages and IQs. According to Martin Courtney of PC Advisor, it falls into two categories: "There's the personal kind when the machine won't do what it's supposed to do. That's very frustrating and can lead to swearing and hitting. Then there's the kind that develops when you can't get the support people out to help."

It's a case of "buyer beware" he says. These days computers are generally reli-

able and the price ranges are very similar. But it's all in the small print. You have to look beyond the promised support contracts. Will they fix the machine on-site, replace it or take it away leaving you with nothing?

"The big companies are not as good as they promise," he says. "Many machines are overpriced because you're supposed to be paying for the back-up support. The manufacturers need to pull their socks up. Instruction manuals and documentation used to be very good but now costs have put paid to that."

There's also no way of telling which companies are good or bad at keeping their support promises as there's never been any research done in this country. So people like me are at the mercy of the manufacturer's hype. I don't know whether I'm pleased or not to find I'm probably one of thousands.

Clive Akass of the magazine *Personal Computer World* recognises the syndrome all too well, but just can't help feeling a wee bit sorry for both the manufacturers and their products. It's a cut-throat business on tight margins, he says. "You don't expect a car manufacturer to tell you how to drive. Everybody wants to kick the screen in at some point but computers are very forgiving. They let you get it wrong more often than humans." Sweet.

But I'm not seduced. I'm neither grateful to my PC for being there nor do I want to cuddle it.

Because one computer is much like another people are differentiating on things like service. EXACTLY. So, where was I? The new machine also turned out to have a fault. I wrote to Compaq's MD saying all the sorts of things you'd expect someone suffering from Computer Rage to say and was greeted by a resounding silence. Some two weeks later, after a couple of wild telephone calls from me and a few feeble apologies from them, I got a call from the director of Compaq's Consumer Division, Ian Jackson.

Lots of sorry, sorry, sorry. You're the only complaint of this kind that I know about. We obviously need to do a lot more work on our back-up skills, we need to empower the people who deal direct with our customers, reconsider our engineer training programmes, etc, etc. "We want," said Mr Jackson, "to be in constant contact with our customers." In my case, of course, they've succeeded on that one. They also agreed to some compensation - undecided as yet.

It was only when I had got right to the top that the empire swung into action. Compaq's training manager and their technical support manager have spent nearly six hours trying to fix the demon in the black box. Have they? No. I await yet another PC.

Excuse me, I must run now. It's 10 minutes since I last called Compaq.

Every time I talked to someone new in customer service they denied the existence of the last person I'd spoken to, and gave me their personal guarantee



Kathy Harvey reports on a new cause of domestic strife - when your partner always gets to the PC before you.

It's Thursday afternoon and I have just returned from a trip to Waitrose with the intention of sneaking into the spare bedroom to finish doing my first year's accounts as a freelance. But as I survey the so-called Office Desk in the corner I am filled with a now familiar feeling - computer. My partner is home early and has got their first.

Before I succumbed to the lure of self-employed home working I barely noticed the presence of my partner's constant office companion, plugged into a spare socket loading up its battery.

I assumed that the hours he spent each evening in front of the little square screen were a sad manifestation of Internet addiction. Now that we're fighting over the facilities, I have discovered he's whiling away the evenings on the laptop completing unfinished work. It's expected of him, and I am expected to put up with it.

Just before I left the BBC, it was suggested to me that I might like to have a special phone line and portable studio equipment installed so I could do interviews from the comfort of my own home - a facility most correspondents now have. Of course I might not like it, but how long could I go on refusing the offer? I had already suffered the embarrassment of doing a phone interview on the Child Support Agency with my own two-year-old providing authentic noises off from the adjoining room, and visions of the future, with me locked in the bedroom broadcasting to local radio every day while my two children bayed for attention were enough to make me go freelance.

Broadcasting isn't the only profession where the division between home and office is blurred. Now that laptops can be used as "docking stations" and plugged into screens anywhere in the office, executives from the salesdesk to the boardroom are being expected to "hotdesk" around the building - or back home if necessary.

David Tong, an organisational psychologist with TSR, an international consultancy specialising in researching employee opinion, says: "Technology has been invited in to the home but in some cases it has polluted it. People want to add value to what they do by taking work home, and the rewards are there for those who want them, but it's not always easy for individuals to control how much work they do." Quite. Surely those who have chosen to swap the office for the spare bedroom should be able to trade an afternoon off for an evening working at the computer. But flexibility goes out of the window when your partner expects to muse in for a few

hours, fiddling with Powerpoint and printing out huge numbers of incomprehensible slides for the next day's presentation.

We're about to compromise with a timetable and a spare computer but both of us are putting off the evil day when we give our five-year-old regular access to the world of information technology. The keyboard's never free - and we don't have any extra plug capacity to plug another terminal in even if we could afford it.

Says Dave Tong: "There should be an investment in the technology to support anyone expected to work from home, and it should be their choice. The advantage of bringing the office back home is a greater sense of control over how you work, but if more and more of your own time is being taken up the pluses start to diminish. Work is habitual and sometimes it's difficult to take a break from it. The new working patterns are forcing us to make far more choices about time management."

Consultants, who specialise in helping professional people manage their careers, encourage clients to make an effort to balance their work and personal life more effectively. Their communications director, Jo Bond, is a former homemaker who opted to go back to office life and now

tries to limit evening work to important occasions. "The essential thing is to come to a personal contract with yourself and know what is acceptable."

And, she says, there's no point trying to be visible all day in the office only to go home and slave over your laptop all night long. "If you spend less time in the office and work from home you have to be clear with your immediate boss about the boundaries you are expected to keep to."

Perhaps it's too late for all those eager thrusting professionals keen to show willing and embrace the information technology age in all its forms. Even before my partner invaded my space with his portable "docking station", the mobile phone was already bringing the joys of his office life into our living room - even invading bank holidays. I drew the line recently after an unpleasant incident near an M6 slip road when I was expected to force-feed our children Snurries while the other breadwinner in the family conducted a three-way conference call with the United States.

No doubt the IT specialists of the world are only too pleased to turn the average manager into a bizarre form of one man band, traipsing across the countryside online to everything but a bit of peace. But I foresee a new branch of family therapy, designed for couples torn apart by rows over the use of the laptop and the lack of spare bedroom space for the in-laws. We are all homeworkers now - whether we like it or not. But some are working harder than others. And now my time's up - it's his turn at the terminal.

I foresee a new branch of family therapy, designed for couples torn apart over the use of the laptop and lack of spare bedroom space for the in-laws

on Poliako

Ian Alland



THE INDEPENDENT

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It's awfully easy for a heterosexual like myself to shrug. Stop! If you don't have to, don't open that can of worms you're thinking about. If you have one shred of heterosexuality in you, cling on to it for dear life and make the most of it, because your life will be immeasurably easier.

Life is easier, after all, if you're in the majority of anything, and gays may be proud but often they have to work extremely hard to get to a point when they can take their sexuality for granted.

It's tempting, too, to say: if you have to give it a try, then do, but make it a one-night stand in a darkened club. At least you'll know whether you enjoy sex with men at all; at least you won't be messing around with the feelings of another poor bloke who's after hearts and rings which you almost certainly can't offer him at this stage.

Perhaps, since Ben is so young, it might be worth his giving gayness a proper go. But let's say he discovers he is bisexual - what then? He could find himself in real trouble, a sexual outcast, a member of no particular camp at all. Suspected by homosexuals, kept at arm's length by heterosexuals, a wandering sexual minstrel who will feel even more alone and different than he ever has in his life.

The problem is that if he's going to go in for a close loving relationship with either sex, unless it's agreed that he has flings on the side with anyone he wants - highly unlikely - he will have to suppress one side of his sexuality in the end. A loving relationship with a guy? Well, if he wants to be faithful, and most of us do, he'll just have to lower

I'd like to try being gay, and get married later

Though Ben fancies women and wants one day to be married and have children, since he was a teenager he's fancied men as well, though he's never done anything about it. After ringing a lonely hearts number he's found a man who'd like a caring relationship. Should he give it a go, even though he knows that one day he'll marry?

his eyes when he sees a pair of lustrous lips and boobs waggling at him across the dinner-table. And if he ends up with this mythical woman, then what? Should he tell her of his - to use one of those strange words that's never found except in connection with sex - proclivities? To tell her would be to make all kinds of non-PC assumptions - that because he has a gay side he'll automatically be promiscuous; that because he's gay and he won't be able to keep his hands off other men, they ought to take special care when it comes to strange diseases. But in an ideal world he should be just as faithful to his heterosexual partner as he should be to his homosexual lover. In other words, at one point in his life, if he really wants to team up with a member of one or other sex, he's going to have to pack up all his other sexual feelings in a box and sit on them extremely tightly. Or, if not, be certain he never does anything about them.

Being bisexual does not mean having your cake and eating it. It means, unless you're going to lead a promiscuous life, having two cakes and eating only one. I think this is going to be extremely difficult after he's had a taste of the other.

Perhaps I'll go back to my instinctive reaction and advise Ben to stick to women. We all have sexual fantasies and proclivities (that word again); it doesn't mean they have to be indulged. There was quite a lot to be said for those old bisexual Victorian husbands who just buttoned themselves up, decided to plump for marriage and threw the rest of their sexual energy into catching butterflies.

WHAT READERS SAY

Go ahead - experiment

Why constrain yourself at such a young age?

I am a gay man in my late twenties who has had a number of gay relationships. I am now in a stable relationship with a man 10 years my senior who has had two lengthy marriages.

Maybe you are bisexual. If you want to explore the potential for a relationship with the guy you have already chatted to, why not?

Which of us ever knows that a relationship is going to be for ever when we embark on it?

Just for the record, my partner says he has never been so happy. Whatever you decide, do it for you - and good luck!

Steve Leeds

Proceed with caution

There is never enough love in the world. If you have this chance to show it, then show it. Otherwise you could torture yourself for the rest of your twenties, as I did, and

never know if it would have worked or not.

But a word of caution - don't put all your eggs in one basket. Talking to someone over the phone can be so different to meeting them in person. You may have to kiss a few frogs before you meet your prince.

Tom Brooks London SW9

Trust your instincts

If you have feelings towards other guys, act on them. Should you decide that a male lover is not really what you want, you won't have lost anything.

I have many gay, bisexual and, of course, heterosexual friends: those of them discovered their true sexuality later in life always say they wish they had played a more varied field much earlier.

How do you know your intentions will go to the opposite sex after a while? Many people find that they are sexually attracted to a person's personality, regardless of their gender. My advice is: get

on the phone to this guy who wanted a caring relationship and see what happens.

David Sands

Respect others' feelings

The idea that everyone is firmly one way or the other is absurd. I have had loving relationships with both men and women, and so has my wife. I had a lot of confusion until I accepted my own feelings were justified.

Ben should look for happiness in a responsible and safe way - safe in the emotional sense as well as any other. If he is in a relationship with a man, that man may well feel extremely insecure if Ben starts talking about women and having children. Some women will also react badly to being told that the ex is a man. However, it is an enormous drain emotionally to be dishonest, and the damage done to relationships when it all comes out is considerably worse.

Peter Wyles London, N22

NEXT WEEK'S DILEMMA

Is it possible for me to change my husband? He has never given me a proper present at Christmas. Or, rather, he's never given me a present that I enjoy. He once gave me a mixer in its plastic bag from the electrical shop. Last year we had a new kitchen put in and he decided to make it my Christmas present, even though I had contributed towards it. In the early days he gave

me a book of DIY, and this year he's said that now we're middle-aged we're too old for Christmas presents. I absolutely long for something to open from my husband, I feel childish, but it gets to me. It need only be a pot plant, or preferably something glittery, smelly or silly. I know Christmas will be ruined by my resentment. What can I do?

Letters are welcome, and everyone who has a suggestion quoted will be sent a bouquet from *Interflora*. Send comments to me at the Features Department, *The Independent*, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL (fax: 0171-293 2182), by Tuesday morning.

And if you have a dilemma of your own that you would like to share, please let me know.

20/LEADER & LETTERS

Le problem: Europe needs leadership, not a petty squabble



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The French for club is le club. Our word. You invented clubs, said Prime Minister Lionel Jospin the other day, and should know how they work. Go and ask those gents loitering on Pall Mall: if you aren't a member, you can't come in. The French position on British membership of the committee handling the Single Currency (Euro-X) is definite, obvious and completely justified. The other potential joiners of next May may be less upfront than the French, their finance ministers more silver-tongued than finance minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn (who with French sauciness compared the British attitude to that of a voyeur trying to get into a married couple's bedroom) but they are obliged to share the view. If the United Kingdom won't join, it has no business on the steering committee.

Of course Gordon Brown is right: the creation of a single currency will have immediate and specific consequences for the British economy, especially its financial

sector. In the interests of stability, those need to be discussed, whether in Euro X with the British attending by invitation, or in Ecofin, the regular seminar of finance ministers. But Britain really cannot have it both ways. The official Labour position, which we applauded, is that after the euro is up and running the British government will conduct a review. If it decides in favour of membership it will consult the British people in a referendum. Until popular assent is given, Britain stands by choice on the outside. It would be somewhat inside out if we were allowed to be outside in.

So what is it Gordon Brown wants? Labour's greatest task is going to be convincing a sceptical public in Britain. It is not at all clear how membership of esoteric committees will help that. Meanwhile Tony Blair's scurrying round behind the back of the French in a bid to secure a different decision at next weekend's Euro summit smacks of the bad old days

of Thatcher-Major amateurism in Euro-diplomacy. The French and the Germans may disagree about who heads the European Monetary Institute, and M Jospin may be putting careful distance between himself and the German Chancellor (who could lose power next year), but the Franco-German axis remains immune to Blairite blandishments.

The Government is ill-advised to prosecute this campaign against rejection. One reason is that there is a danger of making a profound mistake about the likely future shape of the European Union. It may be politically incorrect to say so (in Paris and Brussels as well as London) but the era of "variable geometry" is already with us. The single currency, defence co-operation and the Schengen Agreement on border traffic and controls are three conspicuous examples. Europe is being built at different speeds in north and south, and, shortly, east and west. We cannot fail to

see the problems of creating a core and concentric Europe that are presented by the accession of the eastern European candidates.

There is a very strong case for the EU to secure Europe in a geopolitical sense by taking in the Czech Republic, Poland and the Baltic States. But their immediate accession is impossible, inconceivable without structural reform which has not even yet begun. Structural reform is the jargon: the reality will be cutting payments to farmers across Europe, including Wales, and swingeing reductions in the regional aid programme, which the Spaniards and Portuguese, let alone local politicians in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, do not like one little bit.

But where, in this great battle of institutions and attitudes, is New Labour? Tony Blair, as Lionel Jospin put it in crisp but unattractive French, is "un nouveau". However attractive a figure our Prime Minister cuts among the social de-

mocrats in Rome, Bonn and Paris, his stock of political capital is not infinite. He needs to use it wisely and well, and save most of it for his domestic audience. As Dominique Molfes pointed out the other day, the need to embed Europe in the hearts and minds of real Europeans grows, as the problems of reform and expansion are taken up.

Under Labour, Britain could and should lead in Europe. It could and should forge a new path for Britain by explaining why union is good for Britain, why membership of the Union will aid the sometimes painful adjustment of regions and economies, why we need to reach out to the former Communist countries of the East and assist their necessarily long-term processes of reconstruction. That is what Gordon Brown and Tony Blair should be about, not maudlinly ineffectually about membership of a Euro-money club from which we have, frankly, excluded ourselves.

Post letters to Letters to the Editor and include a daytime telephone number. Fax 0171 293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk. E-mail correspondents are asked to give a postal address. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

LETTERS

ROH and the press

Sir: David Lister cites as evidence of his objectivity in reporting the arts (8 December) his revelation that "the Royal Opera House was paying Sir Jeremy Isaacs for a year after he left". There's a snag. It is not true.

My contract was to end at end September 1997, my 65th birthday. The board asked me to make way for a new chief executive at end December 1996. In compensation I received a modest lump sum and a contribution to my pension, in all a fair bit less than a year's salary. Shameful? I think not.

As for the journalistic rigour of which David Lister makes much, it is in short supply. No newspaper, at the time of the ROH lottery award hoo-ha, pointed out that, even at £78.5m, it was only a proportion of the total arts allocation in one year and a minor proportion over five years, and that four other exactly equal streams of funding were on tap.

No newspaper ever cited average ticket prices at ROH, only the exceptional top.

Most importantly, no newspaper, in my nine years at ROH, ever troubled systematically to compare our funding base with any European comparator, or with the Met in New York.

The select committee, schizophrenically, has just pointed two contrary ways forward for ROH - government control or privatisation. The first course, in Germany, involves 100 per cent funding, with earnings remitted; the second, at the Met, an endowment of nearly \$150m. If only they could have read all about it.

I agree with John Tusa that the arts in Britain, in difficult financial straits, have not been well served by the press. Sir JEREMY ISAACS London WC2
The writer was general director of the Royal Opera House, 1988-97

Angry lone parents

Sir: Like many people, I voted Labour in the expectation of a fairer deal for all members of society and now feel a bitter sense of betrayal that some of the poorest families in Britain are to be penalised further by cuts in benefits.

Tony Blair and Harriet Harman have used the argument

HARRIET HARMAN'S EGO BREAKS FREE FROM IT'S MOORINGS.....



that many single mothers would like to work. The difficulty of finding reasonably paid employment which also allows for the care of a family has been ignored. Many of the jobs that women do are very low paid, part time and insecure. In such jobs, it is not possible to be financially independent, whether or not subsidised childcare is available.

For women with qualifications and professional experience it is difficult, as a lone parent, to accept that it is in your child's best interests for you to take a full-time job which means you do not spend any time with your six-year-old from a Sunday evening to the following Saturday morning.

I have experienced rejection at interview, solely on the grounds of my having a child, from two employers openly concerned that my role as a mother meant that I could not be as committed to their interests as a working father. In both cases this was before I let them know I am a lone parent.

I resent the implication that caring for a child is some sort of hobby that should be fitted around an apparently more valuable role as an employee. Until the structure of "full-time" working hours starts to take account of the need to bring up a family it is inequitable to cut benefits and preach to single mothers that they should be out earning for their families.

RACHEL WHITE Learnington Spa, Warwickshire

Sir: The divorce statistics show that single mothers are not the dizzy young things that this and the last government would like to portray us as. Most of us are deeply committed to the well-being of our children.

The Child Support Agency has failed to get the fathers of these children to support them adequately, so now this government is going for us mothers. Off our backsides and out to work - and we get to leave

our children with strangers for most of the day. If you haven't got a husband to look after you, the state is going to bring up your kids for you, in the form of nursery places, after-school care, and summer schools. LINDA CAIRNES Congleton, Cheshire

Sir: The Government's decision to press ahead with Tory cuts in income support for lone parent families is unnecessary and against the grain of Labour's commendable Welfare to Work programme. When the proposed measures of job creation and childcare provision work through, backed by a decent minimum wage, then lone parents will for the first time have genuine opportunities to work to support their families. But it will be at least two years before these policies are operating effectively. TOM SIBLEY Chair, Hounslow South Labour Party Hounslow, Middlesex

Commons oath

Sir: Bert Ward (letters, 9 December) is probably right that the elected Sinn Féin MPs won't take up their seats even if the current Commons oath were changed. But we should still change it, for two unrelated reasons.

First, it is the right thing, in a pluralist society, to have oaths for public service which are as neutral as possible.

Second, a willingness to modernise, without surrendering democratic principle, strips away the many implausible excuses used by Messrs Adams and McGuinness. And there is a practical example which the Government has initiated in relation to the Northern Ireland police service. The present RUC oath calls on new constables to promise to "well and truly serve" the Sovereign. Under the Scottish model favoured by the Government, the declaration would simply read: "I hereby do solemnly and sincerely and truly

declare and affirm that I will faithfully discharge the duties of the office of Constable."

This would be a reasonable compromise that would apply to all MPs and undercut Sinn Féin's exploitation of the matter. HARRY BARNES MP (Derbyshire North East, Lab) House of Commons

Sir: Some years ago, the oath Canadian MPs must take was changed, by simply omitting the phrase "and her heirs and successors". The result is an oath of personal allegiance to the Head of State, namely Queen Elizabeth II, rather than to the principle of a hereditary monarchy. This compromise has been judged acceptable by nationalist MPs from Quebec, and perhaps ought to be considered here. JEFFREY M EGGER Cambridge

Sir: Why not combine the virtues of the first-past-the-post system with a truly uni-

versal PR? ("Politics in proportion kills passion", 8 December.)

Rather than spend the next ten years looking at alternatives to the present system and at the same time looking to change the composition of the House of Lords, why not keep the present form of voting to elect the House of Commons, then take the nationwide vote in that election as a basis for the composition of the second chamber? So neat. So cost-effective. STEVE BRICKLE London W11

Road or rail

Sir: Last week whilst driving on the M5 north of Bristol, I overtook an InterCity 125. The train in question was being transported by lorry. Is this what is meant by "an integrated transport policy" or have the rail companies come to accept that it is no longer quicker by rail? Dr N P MEYER Malvern, Worcestershire

Deadly luggage

Sir: The problem of carry-on luggage on aircraft is not unique to the USA (report, 2 December). In the UK, carry-on limits are frequently ignored by passengers and airline staff.

If the aviation community were serious about cabin safety, carry-on luggage would be restricted to small hand bags and laptop computers only. Luggage in the cabin often becomes unguided missiles, not only in emergency landings but during heavy turbulence. In emergencies passengers have been known to delay their egress by trying to retrieve their precious cabin luggage. Professor E R GALEA Fire Safety Engineering Group University of Greenwich, London SE18

Cost of healthy food

Sir: Is there a distinction between what is politically correct environmentally and politically correct in health terms? Surely not ("Junk food scores on energy efficiency", 4 December).

Junk food provides empty calories and the consumer and taxpayer pays more in chronic health costs. The intensive, monoculture methods often used to produce the raw materials can pollute the environment and damage biodiversity.

The main reason why healthier food currently does use more energy is packaging and transport costs; 30 per cent of the freight on our roads is foodstuffs. Local and shorter production chains are better all round. Reducing transport and providing fresher foods is essential on both health and environmental grounds. VICKI HIRD Sustainable Agriculture Food and Environment Alliance London N1

Empty rights

Sir: The Government's attempt to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into British law suggests the question, when will it introduce legislation that requires people to accept their human responsibilities? Human rights are of no value if complementary responsibilities are ignored. When will Britain and the West face up to this truth? ANDREW BOWDLER Pokhara, Nepal

diplomatic nice

Just the job: careers advice for budding hunt saboteurs, Spice Girls managers, train drivers ...



MILES KINGTON

Today's guest expert was to have been Earl Spencer, who was due to offer advice on your emotional and marital problems.

Unfortunately, negotiations about his fee broke down, and so instead I am glad to welcome Kevin Tiller, Professor of Employment Studies at Milton Keynes University, who is going to offer careers advice to younger readers. All yours. Prof I would like to be a journalist but I just don't know if I have got what it takes in this modern, competitive world.

Professor Tiller writes: OK, let's try a simple little test. What you have to do is think up a headline for a piece of news. Here's the news. Chris Evans buys up Virgin Radio. Right, what's the headline?

Ummmmmm ... "Chris Evans Buys Up Virgin Radio"

Professor Tiller writes: Oh, come on, lad! You can do better than that!

Ummmmmm - I know! "Yes, it's Virgin Radio!"

Professor Tiller writes: Excellent. Just what The Sun chose. You'll go far. And the next?

How do I set about being manager of the Spice Girls?

Professor Tiller writes: Hurry, hurry, hurry, while stocks last! Actually, if you want my advice, it would be much better to be ex-manager of the Spice Girls. Next!

How do I set about becoming a full-time hunt saboteur? Whenever I have gone after a meet, I have always enjoyed the camaraderie of the hunt, and the excitement of the chase, and I would like to devote more time to it.

Professor Tiller writes: Sadly, it is quite possible that Parliament may soon decide to ban hunting with dogs altogether, which will spell the end of the noble calling of

the hunt saboteur, and turn loose on the countryside hundreds of unemployed and aimless ex-saboteurs. It would be a tragedy. I believe there are plans afoot to retrain them as angling saboteurs, though I personally would feel that snipping fishing lines in half and tipping tins of maggots into the water would not have the same thrill and romance as old-style hunt sabotage.

I would like to join the BBC and make programmes. How do I set about this?

Professor Tiller writes: I am not sure that the BBC is recruiting programme makers any more. It might be safer to join the BBC and become one of the men or women who scrutinise incoming programme proposals from independent producers.

Why? Professor Tiller writes: Because, then, if you spot a really good idea, you can

write back to the independent producer and say that although it is a good idea, the BBC are, alas, already working on a very similar project.

But what if they aren't? Oh, they always are. Or if they aren't, they very soon will be. Next!

I would like to be a train driver when I grow up.

Professor Tiller writes: You won't when you grow up. Next!

I would like to be the next Chris Evans.

Professor Tiller writes: See answer to last question. Next!

I would like to be the daughter of a well-known agony aunt who decides to satirise the pretensions of her mother's craft by going missing and precipitating a police search costing tens of thousands of pounds and then turning up days later perfectly safe and well, with the mother covering up her

confusion by saying: "Oh, we knew she could look after herself all along," which rather begs the question of why mother alerted the police in the first place ...

Professor Tiller writes: You're living in a fantasy world. Things like this don't happen. Snap out of it, woman! Now, one last question, please!

When I grow up, I would like to be the man whose job it is to chase round the world after Richard Branson's big balloon when it goes off without him, or indeed without anyone on board at all, and I would chase it in my helicopter till I caught up with it and then I would radio back: "Balloon at 30,000ft over Kenya, heading out Indian Ocean at 80 knots, please advise!"

Professor Tiller writes: Thank goodness someone has got a practical, realistic game plan at last. You should do well. Tomorrow: Grand Competition! Win one of Earl Spencer's old girlfriends!!

One promise that Labour really ought to break



POLLY TOYNBEE
CUTTING NHS WAITING LISTS

"Waiting lists will be shorter." That's what Labour promised in election posters up and down the land. Those who know about these things shook their heads: expensive, difficult and probably wrong. But there it is, Tony Blair is the promise-keeper and the five pledges will be kept, even if it distorts NHS spending and undermines some of this week's excellent NHS White Paper. Even if it means treating the wrong people for the wrong reasons, for this is a political not a medical imperative.

What is the absolute minimum that pledge commits them to? Could they just reduce the number of people waiting over a year? After all, if millions are on the list it doesn't matter. What people care about is how long they wait. But no, apparently that won't do. The politicians say the pledge means there must be fewer people on the total list by the next election.

Taking the pulse of the NHS is well nigh impossible. For every story of heroic new treatments, there are matching anecdotes of hospitals running short of sheets, overstretched nurses in under-staffed wards and exhausted junior doctors doing operations way past their bedtime and their competence. How are we to tell if things are getting better or worse, overall?

The only easy measure every news editor and politician understands is the number of patients on the waiting list, although it may reveal little of importance. Mightn't people rather wait longer for better treatment, supposing that was a choice? The best aspect of this week's White Paper was the new drive towards excellence. The National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) will insist on national standards, making sure that all doctors know and use the best treatments. Currently standards vary frighteningly, with some surgeons killing five or six times more than others. (How NICE forces doctors to obey the standard, we don't yet know but at least they'll have national authority to intervene.)

Clinical effectiveness is the new watchword, striking out useless and outdated treatments, pushing for the best. But measuring the success of that process and presenting it in a way everyone can understand will be difficult. It will also be a lot harder to achieve if too much money and attention is squandered on waiting list reductions.

Here's the size of the problem: At the start of the NHS in 1948 there were 500,000 people on the waiting list, rising ineluctably upwards to over a million now. There have been occasional slight dips, but even in years when the Tories made most effort to clear out defunct old lists - which included the dead, those who'd already been treated or those who no longer wanted treatment - the figures barely changed. Even when they introduced their market reforms with a vast infusion of cash, the list went up. Through super-human efforts, with list-busting bud-

gets and expensive initiatives, Clark and Bottomley did manage to clear out everyone waiting over two years, which was quite an achievement. But total numbers still rose.

Getting total numbers down has eluded everyone so far. Lists keep rising because there are new treatments to queue for and more old people who need more operations. Patients are more demanding now, less patient. And whenever local waiting lists shrink, GPs just refer more patients and fill them up again. The explosion of day-surgery units should mean lower waiting lists, but this appears to have created more demand.

Dr Alastair Lack in Salisbury has pioneered a new priority waiting list system, awarding patients points on four scales: they get points for their rate of deterioration (so cancer scores high), for the pain they suffer, for their level of disability, and for time already spent waiting. So time is only one factor. Without significant points on the other measures, some minor conditions might never be treated and the patient would be warned accordingly.

But it hasn't worked. The hospital wanted to bring it in, but found they couldn't. Why not? Because their contracts with local health authorities demanded everyone on the list be treated within one year. That meant that firefighting was all they could do - treating only emergencies and long waiters, with no money to treat anyone else. So a one-year varicose vein has to be treated before someone in agony in a wheelchair for need of a new hip. The hips never get treated until they hit the one-year deadline. The Government has now tied its hands in the same way by demanding reduced lists and not prioritising treatments. (Prioritising sounds dangerously like rationing to the politicians.)

A national list-buster has been appointed, Stephen Day, who worked miracles in the West Midlands. However, he spent £30m in one region alone, while the Government has allocated just £5 m for pilot schemes for the whole country. So how is he going to do it? He's blunt: "It can't be done without money". He only managed what he calls "tail-gunning" the back end of his list by using extra money, to ensure the priorities of the list were not distorted. So he's putting systems in place now, hoping for more money in two years.

And there is plenty that can be done. Consultants are the key to it all, because they control the lists, but getting control of them has eluded every government. Here the new Clinical Effectiveness team will be monitoring how well they do: if the worst surgeons improved, there'd be fewer re-admissions for bungs and infections and so lower waiting lists. Consultants are expensive but often their time is wasted: some orthopaedic surgeons do just one or two operating lists a week while others do four. Some ENT consultants do only 300 operations a year while others do 1200 identical ones. Usually this is not laziness, but management ineptitude and failure to rationalise. (Though managers might ask why so many surgeons take a full day off the NHS for private practice, for only one eleventh less salary?)

If everything in the white paper worked miraculously to plan, in theory waiting lists should come down, simply through better practice. But history suggests otherwise. Far more likely that as the next election approaches, there will be another panic "waiting-list initiative". Money will be bunged at tailgunning the lists, draining resources from geriatrics or mental health - which can't be measured except in schizophrenic murders. So when Blair mounts the podium to boast he's kept his promise, it may be yet another vow that might have been better honoured in the breach.

I felt like I was surrounded by a dozen abseiling homunculi

JOHN WALSH



It's a rite of passage you hear about, like some *Niebelung* sacrifice in the forests of Westphalia, but never imagine you'll actually go through yourself. And then you get the call. The Fact-Checking department of *The New Yorker* magazine is on your case and there's no escape.

This legendary throng of literal-minded obsessives are the Stormtroopers of the sub-editorial universe. They take the verification of detail to frankly barmy extremes. Their inquiries are of a kind unknown in British journalistic circles. Most sub-editors I've known on newspapers in the past (not *The Independent*, of course, by no means, absolutely not) tend to say, "John - this piece of yours. Are there any, you know, true bits in it? Oh never mind..."

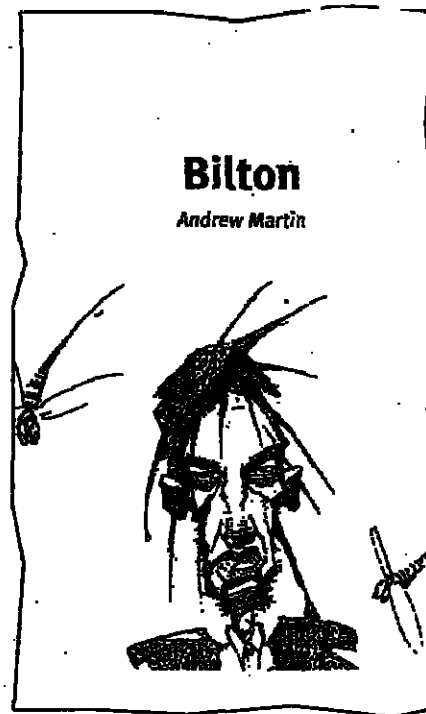
And leave it at that. On *The New Yorker*, if you've written, "He shook his head," they ask you if it was up and down or from side to side. I had a dozen conversations with three of them, as increasingly bizarre inquiries about tiny little fact-ettes and huge irrelevancies rained down

around me. By the end I felt like John Goodman, surrounded by a dozen abseiling homunculi in *The Borrowers*.

I'd written an article about an American writer who had once studied at Harvard, where, he'd told me, "Bob Dylan came with a 12-string guitar and played at our freshman mixer." The Fact Checkers pounced. Bob Dylan, as far as they could establish, never played a 12-string guitar. Couldn't they just take the writer's word for it? Hah! Mocking laughter echoed down the telephone. How do you know (I asked) he didn't play one just one evening in his life? The guitar problem hung in the air, but another inquiry reared its head. The chap in my article had said something about his search for identity when young - how "You look at the five billion people in the world and think, 'Where's my peer group?'" This is all very well, said Fact Checker No 2, but at the time this man looked at the world, the population of the globe was actually three million. My dear chap, I said, he didn't actually stand on some high rock and count the bloody... but it was too late. We'd moved on to the important crux of whether the bloke's address in north London was in Camden or Kenish Town, and whether the hamsters in his bathroom really are, or were, Russian.

Then Fact Checker No 3 came on the line. "About the Dylan guitar thing. We've talked to a Dylan expert. No, he didn't ever actually play a 12-string. But in 1963 he was touring with a man who owned a 12-string, so he could have been holding it for him..."

Last year, we had Amanda Craig's sparkling *roman-a-clef*, *A Vicious Circle*, in which the words of literary journalism and Groucho Club *bonheurism* were amusingly trashed. One journalist objected so much to a dissembling fictional portrait of himself that he threatened legal sanctions and had the book withdrawn. It was later re-written and brought out by another publisher. This year has been a little short on media novels in which the nightmares of Sobel and the Cobden Club can see



Spot the difference: the fictional Bilton and Will Self



Photograph: David Rose

their lovely features hideously distorted. But making some amends in the New Year is Andrew Martin, a feature writer on the *Evening Standard's* magazine, *ES*.

His first novel, *Bilton*, is a droll tale of a parallel newspaper universe, in which the eponymous Martyn B, a difficult, oddly featured, howlingly left-wing journalist who perpetrates a physical attack on the British prime minister in public one day and rises in consequence on a fountain of transmedial celebrity. Readers will have little trouble identifying the prototypes of *Grass*, the green wellie magazine, or *Hatstand*, the right-wing weekly with its Georgian front door, its garden parties and charismatic editor, Grey Faulkner; or Rupert Granger, the aggressive TV current affairs inquisitor ("Let's turn to what I suppose I must call your economic policy"); or Little Willie Melchitt, the volatile Chief Editor in Chief (sic) of *The New Globe*, or even General Zubarov, a renegade Zhirnovsky-like Russian dictator.

Mr Martin would, I'm sure, argue that his characters are not meant to correspond with real-life people (his fictional Prime Minister, Lazenby, for instance, is a winningly idiotic creation with no apparent correlative at the Commons) but some of his hits are strikingly direct ones. Like *Bilton* himself, the chap who goes from disgrace to TV stardom in a matter of weeks. Did Mr Martin know when he wrote the book that Mr William Self (a ringer, you must agree, for the jacket illustration) was going to move from front-page tabloid obloquy to having his own chat show in eight months?

Like everyone else, parent or otherwise, I was relieved when Anne Atkins's daughter Lara was found unharmed after her

chilly adventures in Hammer-Smith Broadway. And I was very moved to read her bleak account of them, alongside her mother's harrowing record of waiting by the phone for the news. But I'd still love to get my hands on the daughter's diary, the one of which we know one single entry: "Hodie, I depart."

Would it tell us various things we would like to know? Like whether Lara, at 12, had outgrown the soubriquet "Bink" (or "Little, helpless, dotty Bink" in her mother's expanded formulation) and had got over the experience of being coerced into joining a super-sophisticated girls' school? Would it record her disenchantment with a religious household where the first thing you do when your daughter disappears is ring your "prayer partner" and organise a "prayer chain"?

Would it say why Lara refused to have pocket money, and whether it had anything to do with her mother's curious insistence on its importance ("I have made her well aware of what it has meant in terms of money and manpower to have 100 policemen searching for her"). And would it chart, with or without Latin code, the process by which a chatty, loving, Fulham household of mad-cap Christians might induce any awkward pre-teenager to hide from people so they wouldn't find me?

Next year is, of course, the bicentenary of *Lyrical Ballads*,

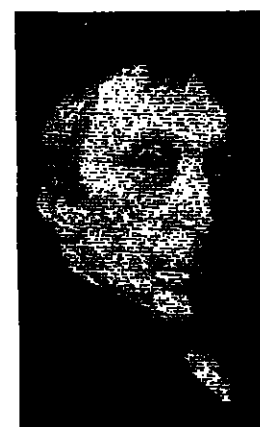
that seminal work of English Romanticism, and the airwaves will be alive with anniversary tributes to its co-authors, Wordsworth and Coleridge, the Wallace and Gromit of the Lake Poets.

Not all the available media hands on the daughter's diary, the one of which we know one single entry: "Hodie, I depart."

Would it tell us various things we would like to know? Like whether Lara, at 12, had outgrown the soubriquet "Bink" (or "Little, helpless, dotty Bink" in her mother's expanded formulation) and had got over the experience of being coerced into joining a super-sophisticated girls' school? Would it record her disenchantment with a religious household where the first thing you do when your daughter disappears is ring your "prayer partner" and organise a "prayer chain"?

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Next year is, of course, the bicentenary of *Lyrical Ballads*, childhood and spiritual growth. *The Prelude*, might be adapted for the Classic Serial slot on Sundays. "You do know, don't you, that this is a half-hour slot?" replied the editor scornfully. "I think we'll need something more substantial than a *Prelude* to fill it."



Wordsworth: not epic enough for Radio 4

Put diplomatic niceties aside and tell Turkey the truth



RUPERT CORNWELL
MEMBERSHIP OF THE EU

It is, to borrow the phrase a bemused Warren Christopher, the former US Secretary of State, once used at the height of the Bosnia crisis, Europe's "problem from hell." And this week, foursquare and inescapable, the problem once more confronts the European Union summiters gathered in Luxembourg: What to do about Turkey, the EU's eternally disappointed aspirant?

This time the stakes are higher than ever. A new round of enlargement negotiations is about to begin, and once again Turkey's number has not come

up: not in the first group of six selected candidates, nor even in the second group of five Eastern European countries who have been promised talks later. That alone was galling enough. Adding insult to injury however, the number of Cyprus did come up. No wonder the Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz has been in London warning Tony Blair that this was a "decisive moment" in his country's relations with Europe. No more "third rate treatment": Turkey wanted its own firm undertakings - or else. Such is the mess that the EU leaders are having second thoughts about a dinner invitation extended to Mr Yilmaz after the summit. Why dine together if you have nothing to talk about?

Which brings to mind the celebrated definition of a diplomat as opposed to a lady: When a diplomat says yes he means maybe, when he says maybe he means no, and if he says no he ain't no diplomat (for the definition of the lady, reverse "Yes" and "No" throughout).

Well, that is more or less the diplomatic dance the EU has been leading Turkey for decades. Indeed, it was back in 1963 that Turkey first concluded

an association agreement with the then European Economic Community, the same year General de Gaulle delivered his first *Non* to British membership (but then the General never was a diplomat).

Talk to European officials in private and they say there's absolutely no prospect of Turkey joining in the foreseeable future. But that's not quite how it's come out in diplomatese. The goal now is "rapprochement". Turkey, it is said, is subject to the same conditions as every one else, and the country "remains on track". But on track to what, and when? Clearly a new gambit was required, and the diplomats duly produced one. Assuming approval in Luxembourg, it will be called the European Conference. It will consist of regular summit meetings of the 15 current EU members, the 11 aspirants, and Turkey - with the undeclared but primary purpose of keeping the Turks quiet. Unfortunately, without a guarantee that it will be admitted as a future candidate, Ankara says it is not interested.

In short, the diplomats may have outsmarted themselves. For with a little more plain-speaking earlier, the contortions

would probably not have been necessary. The truth is that Turkey, for all its Westernisation, is still an impossible mouthful for the European Union to swallow. The problem is not so much its economy (bad, but little worse than some of the EU's accepted suitors from Eastern Europe) or even the fact that it is 98 per cent Muslim - but with its political and human rights record.

Essentially, arguments in favour of an early start to entry negotiations are all negative arguments. Why, it is asked, does Turkey's hour never come, while Estonia and Slovenia - who 10 years ago were not even sovereign countries - are accepted at the first time of asking? Rejection, it is said, will virtually remove any chance of resolving the Cyprus dispute. More serious still, if Europe spurns it anew, this strategically vital Nato country may turn its back on the West in favour of the Islamic world. This in turn, it is argued, would weaken its fragile democracy and offer a fresh opening for theocratic Islam: only six months ago, after all, the Islamic-leaning government of Necmettin Erbakan was eased out, under intense pressure

from the Turkish military.

To deal with those points in order. Underlying the first of them is the age-old question of whether Turkey is a part of Europe. To which the answer is: less so than 150 years ago, when the country was an integral part of the European balance of power. Half of Turkey's trade may be with the EU. But Slovenia and Estonia are geographically far closer to the continent's fading, but not entirely vanished, East-West fault line. Turkey is a large Muslim country on its south-eastern fringe.

Second, Cyprus. Yes, reuniting the divided island will not get any easier, with Greece firmly inside the EU and Turkey again knocking on a locked door. And, assuming the summit endorses the Commission's proposals, Europe has done itself no favours with its weird decision to open entry negotiations with Cyprus - i.e. the internationally recognised Greek half of the island - in the teeth of understandable and bitter Turkish protest. But that begs the question of whether a Cypriot "solution" along conventional lines is possible. Diplomats still chase the chimera of a bi-zonal federa-

tion of the Greek and Turkish parts. After 23 years of fruitless search, however, the most realistic solution may be to turn *de facto* partition into *de jure* partition.

Finally, the political future of Turkey itself. Is it really the proper job of the EU to take in new members to save them from themselves? And is it really certain that the mere promise of EU membership would trump the appeal of Islamism, or that the lack of such a promise would alienate Turkey from the West, or in the worst of cases provoke it into walking out of Nato.

That brings us to the strongest obstacles to Turkish membership - the political power of the armed forces - demonstrated again in the ousting of Mr Erbakan, and at basic odds with the civilian, democratic heritage of the EU - and a dismal record of human rights abuses against Kurdish autonomists in Eastern Turkey. These are matters that Turkey's politicians alone can decide. In the meantime good friendship and military alliance with Turkey is one thing. EU membership, for the time being, is another. If only the diplomats had said so before.



The strings they are a-changing? Alastair McDonald

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THE BLUE CROSS

Generators deal staves pit closures off until June

The English coalfields were granted a six-month stay of execution yesterday after the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, disclosed that the three power generators had struck an agreement with RJB Mining that will avoid any pit closures or redundancies until June next year. But, as Michael Harrison discovered, confusion reigns over the terms of the deal and how many collieries can be saved in the longer term.

Mr Blair told the Commons that National Power, PowerGen and Eastern Group had agreed supply arrangements with RJB for three months after the existing coal contracts run out in April so that a full review of energy policy can be carried out.

The agreement follows approaches to the three companies by a ministerial emissary of the Prime Minister asking them to do all they could to purchase more coal.

Under the rescue deal thrashed out with RJB, the generators are understood to have agreed to increase their emergency stockpiles of coal at the power stations to throw the pits a lifeline. One estimate was that stockpiles might be raised by as much as 8 million tonnes.

Current stockpiles are around 12 to 13 million tonnes but Michael Clapham, Labour MP for Barnsley West and Penistone, has been urging the Government to increase this to 20 million tonnes.

Last night, however, it was far from clear how the agreement would be implemented and who would bear any financial losses arising from it. One of the generators said: "This is an agreement to sit down and help RJB through the next six months but the details have not been worked out. We don't know what volumes will be involved and at what price or what the split will be between the three of us."

It also emerged that PowerGen has still not signed a contract to buy any coal from RJB from next April. In the current financial year the three generators are contracted to buy 27 million tonnes from RJB.

So far only National Power and Eastern have contracted to buy supplies next year and these contracts only cover 12 million tonnes of coal.

The stand-off with the generators had led to fears that up to half the 17 deep mines in England could close with the loss of at least 5,000 jobs as demand for RJB's coal fell by a half. PowerGen had indicated that it was not interested in buying more than 2 million tonnes of coal against the 9 million it is taking this year and then only if RJB agreed to cut its prices by a further 15 per cent from those already quoted.

Announcing the agreement in the Commons, Mr Blair said, to cheers: "This will allow the UK deep-mine coal industry to continue production at present levels without immediate redundancies or pit closures." The Prime Minister added: "This is a six-month delay, however, and what is important is that we then use that opportunity to review the long-term energy requirements of the nation and make sure that we have an energy policy that is consistent both with a competitive industry and with the long-term energy needs of the country."

John Redwood, shadow president of the Board of Trade, said: "Any stay of execution for the coal industry is welcome but the Government's proposal is no substitute for setting out a proper energy policy. The Government needs to tell us soon what balance it wants between gas and coal-fired stations. Its hesitations and U-turns so far leave miners fearing for their jobs and the gas industry unsure of whether it should plan for an expanded future or not."

RJB Mining refused to comment on the details of the agreement but welcomed the announcement: "This is a positive step forward which will be warmly received in the coalfields."

National Power said that it had been "rather confused" by the announcement. A spokesman said it had already publicly undertaken to buy some more coal from UK suppliers in the coming months but only at competitive prices. The generator also appeared to pour cold water on the idea that stockpiles could be increased above current levels. These are already above the minimum security levels required by law and also above what National Power regards as commercially prudent levels.



The market soured for cider makers as last year's tax hike and competition from new drinks hit their margins

Bulmer shares tumble as profits dive

HP Bulmer, the Strongbow and Woodpecker cider maker, highlighted the tremendous problems facing the cider business when it announced a sharp fall in profits yesterday. Andrew Yates reports on industry in real trouble.

Investors in HP Bulmer took fright yesterday sending its shares down 15p to 392.5p as the group announced a 17.5 per cent fall in pre-tax profits to £14.3m for the six months to October. The poor set of results sent shock waves reverberating around the

industry, coming just 24 hours after rival Matthew Clark was forced to make its second profits warning in 18 months.

John Rudgard, Bulmer's chief executive, said: "There is no doubt that the market is difficult at the moment and sales have been very disappointing."

Bulmer and Matthew Clark have both embarked on multi-million pound advertising campaigns in an attempt to revive cider sales.

"There are some signs that the decline in the cider market has been halted," insisted Mr Rudgard. However, City analysts pointed out that the marketing drive had yet to show any tangible benefits and were sceptical that the cider producers' gamble would pay off.

"It will be a long hard slog. It could take years for there to be any improvement in cider sales," one drinks analyst said.

The cider market has been hit by the proliferation of new beers such as Caffrey's and the emergence of alcopops. Bulmer also said that the 7.5 per cent tax hike on strong ciders last year had created turmoil in the market.

Merrydown is likely to become the first casualty of the cider industry's troubles and is currently being circled by predators. However, both Bulmer and Matthew Clark have now ruled themselves out of the running to takeover their struggling rival, leaving Pernod Ricard as the favourite to strike.

Investment Column, page 24

Pfizer to create 1,500 jobs at R&D site in Kent

In one of the biggest single research and development investments into the UK, around 1,500 new jobs are to be created by an expansion of Pfizer's drugs research facility in Sandwich, Kent.

The US pharmaceuticals giant is planning to invest between £100m and £150m, including financial assistance from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). Pfizer already employs 3,500 people at the Sandwich site, which specialises in human and animal drug research. Capitalised at \$97bn (£59bn), it is the world's sixth-largest drugs group, employing 47,000 people worldwide.

Its new investment programme, to be unveiled today by the DTI and Pfizer, will be used to expand Pfizer's human medicine research.

Pfizer is a leading force in cardiovascular medicine, with drugs including Istin and Cardura, and is regularly ranked alongside Glaxo Wellcome and Merck as one of the world's best run drug companies.

Pfizer's decision will come a major boost to Government's inward investment programme, which was rocked by Toyota's decision this week to open a new car plant in France rather than in the UK.

That news followed a strong run of investments by foreign companies into the UK in 1996 under the Conservative government, including the creation of more than 6000 jobs in Wales by Lucky Goldstar, the Korean consumer electronics group.

The government's backing for Pfizer will be seen as further evidence of the government's commitment to supporting science and technology in the UK. It follows the decision by Microsoft, the US computer group to make a £50m investment in a new plant in Cambridgeshire this summer.

Kingfisher casts gloom over sales prospects for Christmas

Christmas is looking like a miserable one for Britain's retailers. Shares in Kingfisher and Dixons slumped yesterday as Kingfisher warned of stiff competition in the Christmas holiday period and reported a slowdown of sales growth at Comet, its electrical goods chain. The warning follows monthly figures from the British Retail Consortium on Tuesday which showed a sharp slowdown in November sales.

Sir Geoffrey Mulcahy, Kingfisher chief executive, warned: "Our fourth-quarter performance will be crucial and Christmas trading is proving more competitive than ever." The comments came as Kingfisher announced a healthy 7.8 per cent like-for-like sales growth in the third quarter to 1 November across its businesses, but a slowdown in like-for-like sales at Comet, Kingfisher's Comet, Woolworth and Superdrug chains are the chief beneficiaries of Christmas spending. A spokesman for the company said pressure was growing from customers for value for money. "It's getting tougher and tougher to attract customers," said the company.

The BRC survey showed the value of retail sales in November grew just 1.1 per cent compared to a 4.9 per cent growth in November 1996 and warned that retailers faced a "white-knuckle ride" at Christmas. The Office of National Statistics has also pointed to a marked slowdown of retail price inflation in November.

Richard Hyman from Verdict, the retail consultants, said that part of the reason for the weak figures for November was a spending boom in the comparative period last year, helped by the cold weather. This year demand has been held back by early spending of windfall gains, the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, and rising interest rates.

- Sameena Ahmad

Bank committee voted unanimously on rates rise

City analysts might be divided about whether interest rates should have gone up last month, but the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee was not. Minutes of its meeting, published yesterday, showed a unanimous vote for the quarter-point rise. Diane Coyle, Economics Editor, reads between the lines.

The minutes of the Monetary Policy Committee's discussion in November caused some City experts almost as much surprise as the quarter-point rate rise that

followed the meeting. For widespread rumours of a vote split between inflation hawks and doves turned out to be false.

What's more, the minutes made it clear that the committee had left the door open to further rate increases. There remains a clear possibility of another move in the new year.

Kevin Gardiner, an economist at investment bank Morgan Stanley who is predicting at least one more step up in the cost of borrowing, said: "The fact that the decision was unanimous suggests the committee members felt the case was clear cut."

The minutes set out three possible scenarios for the economy. One placed more weight on recent signs that growth has peaked, but the other two indicated a need for immediate action to keep inflation on target.

In the first case, this would be an insurance policy against the danger that the effect of the strong pound on exports not being enough to slow growth to a sustainable pace. In the other, a rate increase was definitely necessary because of evidence of over-strong growth and a tight labour market.

In support of the latter case, the minutes listed all the signs that growth and inflation had turned out higher than expected during the previous few months. In particular, the lack of spare capacity, recruitment difficulties and rapid broad money growth weighed in favour of this interpretation.

Although agreeing that there was a lot of uncertainty about inflation prospects, the committee members therefore agreed on an immediate quarter point rise.

The minutes said: "A policy tightening would bring output back to its trend level more quickly, and if necessary interest rates could be cut if new evidence emerged that the economy was weaker than expected."

They also stressed the danger of not acting at once: "If, on the other hand, policy was not tightened, there was a risk that inflation expectations would rise as strong demand pressures persisted. The committee might then find itself having to tighten sharply, increasing the risk of a recession, to bring things back on course."

As a matter of tactics, the committee also favoured raising rates before the publication of figures expected to show a rebound in retail sales and disappointing retail price inflation.

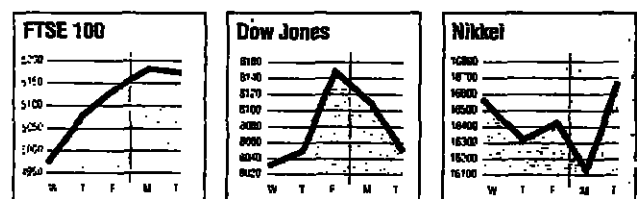
Delaying until afterwards would make it look as if the Bank was reacting too late to bad news.

Simon Briscoe, an economist at Nikko Europe who criticised last month's move as unnecessary, said yesterday: "In the face of uncertainty, the Bank assumes the worst." He said no further action was now needed.

Mr Gardiner, on the other hand, said: "The Bank will raise rates if pay settlements accelerate in the New Year, even if growth slows. And I don't think growth is going to slow all that fast."

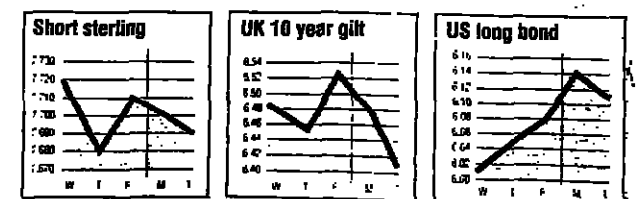
John O'Sullivan, an economist with NatWest Markets, pointed out that the fact that the vote was unanimous did not mean there were no dissenters on the panel.

STOCK MARKETS



Indices	Close	Change	Change(%)	52 wk high	52 wk low	Yield(%)
FTSE 100	5177.10	-10.30	-0.20	5397.30	3833.90	3.40
FTSE 250	4781.90	-0.60	-0.01	4965.80	4347.30	3.41
FTSE 350	2485.20	-4.00	-0.16	2570.50	1958.10	3.40
FTSE All Share	2424.81	-3.53	-0.15	2507.68	1946.17	3.40
FTSE SmallCap	2305.6	1.30	0.05	2407.40	2127.50	3.45
FTSE Preceding	1252.9	1.30	0.10	1348.50	1203.20	3.42
FTSE AIM	976.8	-1.50	-0.15	1138.00	965.90	1.10
Dow Jones	8049.66	-61.18	-0.75	8298.03	6236.05	1.70
Nikkei	16586.51	554.94	3.44	20910.79	14966.13	0.93
Hang Seng	11490.66	-232.28	-2.00	16820.31	8775.88	3.69
Dax	4164.91	-38.45	-0.91	4458.89	2797.54	1.91

INTEREST RATES

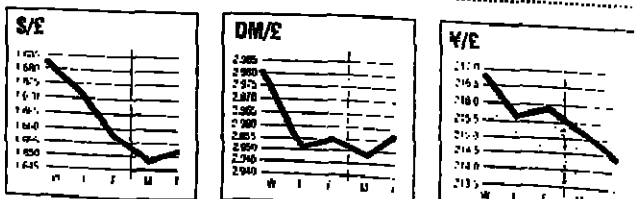


Money Market Rates	3 month	1 yr	1 yr	1 yr	1 yr	1 yr	1 yr
UK	7.75	1.36	7.87	0.96	6.41	1.08	6.33
US	5.94	0.40	6.13	0.41	5.82	-0.27	-0.35
Japan	0.74	0.27	0.72	0.13	1.97	-0.62	-0.56
Germany	3.76	0.52	4.09	0.80	5.40	-0.37	5.95

MAIN PRICE CHANGES

Rises	Falls
Halma PLC 118.50 16.00 15.61	Wimpey (G) PLC 100.50 -5.50 -5.15
Chryslers Int 275.00 24.50 9.78	Ream PLC -277.50 -13.00 -4.36
Tatewest Corn 84.90 5.00 6.23	Inchcape PLC 203.00 -9.50 -4.47
Wills Caroon 139.00 8.00 6.11	Brit Via PLC 234.00 -9.50 -3.90

CURRENCIES



Pound	Dollar	Yen
Dollar 1.6520 +0.40c 1.6518	Starling 0.9053 -0.17p 0.9041	D-Mark 1.7905 +0.18p 1.7923
D-Mark 2.9555 +0.72p 2.9560	Yen 129.78 -40.80 129.37	£ index 104.10 +0.10 93.00
Yen 214.14 -11.21 187.39	\$ index 108.70 +0.00	

OTHER INDICATORS

Item	Value	Change	Item	Value	Change
Brent Oil (\$)	17.53	-0.27	GDP	113.90	3.90
Gold (\$)	282.75	-1.10	RPI	159.60	3.7
Silver (\$)	5.38	-0.05	Bse Rates	7.25	6.00

www.bloomberg.com

source: Bloomberg

financial crisis in

FIVE CAL



OUTLOOK

The Fat Controller calls a halt at Railtrack

Given that the Rail Regulator John Swift cannot plunder Railtrack's revenues until 2001, the 8 per cent drop in its share price which accompanied yesterday's launch of the review of access charges looks like a short-term panic response to a longer term problem. But regulators do make the City jittery these days, and after the treatment Clare Spottiswoode meted out to poor old British Gas, there is no telling how beastly Mr Swift may choose to be.

Railtrack undoubtedly got away with a very generous regulatory regime when the access charging formula was put in place in 1995. A one-off cut of eight per cent in charges followed by real reductions for the next five years of 2 per cent hardly looked challenging for an organisation carrying the amount of excess baggage left to it by British Rail.

The share price rather tells the story. In the eighteen months since privatisation, Railtrack has more than doubled in value while the profits have been piling up at the same remorseless rate as Virgin Trains receives customer complaints. Not surprising for a business where 94 per cent of the income is guaranteed by the taxpayer via the subsidies paid to Railtrack's customers, the train operating companies.

Now Railtrack is about to pay the price, if the Regulator gets his way. Buried away in the small print of yesterday's consultative document is a paragraph inviting views on why the company should be allowed a rate of return any higher than 8 per cent. The sort of figure Railtrack has been bandying around the City is a good deal north of that.

Following in the footsteps of the laughing regulatory at Ofgas, Mr Swift has also dropped a heavy hint that the value of the regulated asset base on which Railtrack will be allowed to earn a return will be much closer to its £2bn flotation price than the £7.4bn figure which appears in the accounts.

Oddly enough, the one person who may slow up the Swift express as it bears down on Railtrack is the Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott. If Railtrack has its way, then very soon it will end up owning not just the rail network but also a slice of London Underground and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, turning it into the sort of monopoly provider that old Labour so loved, albeit a privately-owned one. With so much of his integrated transport policy riding on Railtrack's investment strategy, Mr Prescott can't afford to be too beastly.

The Government's new partnership with industry seems to be working rather well. Or is it? Tony Blair, the Prime Minister, proudly announced yesterday that a deal had been successfully brokered between the main electricity generators and Richard Budge's RJB that would keep the pits open for at least another six months. Splendid news, and clear evidence that

New Labour can indeed stop market forces doing exactly as they please. Unfortunately, the generators were at a loss to know what on earth he was on about. One of them, National Power, said there had been no agreement at all. Others said what agreement there was didn't add up to a hill of beans. Not such good news after all.

What's going on here? The answer seems to be that the Government has stirred the pot and come up with a classic piece of meaningless whitehall fudge. Yes, there is an agreement of sorts, but not one capable of the grandiose interpretation the Government put on it. Existing contracts between the generators and Mr Budge run until the end of March in any case, so even accepting the Government has persuaded the generators to extend these contracts, it isn't six months, but just three.

Even this seems to exaggerate the true position, however, for although some of the generators admit to agreeing to help if they can, by for instance increasing their stock piles of coal, all of them say there is no question of persisting with present levels of demand for British coal after existing contracts expire. Certainly, there has been no agreement on quantity or price other than those already announced.

The whole thing is eerily reminiscent of Michael Heseltine's famous "coal review". Faced with a public outcry over plans to close down most of British Coal, the then President of the Board of Trade,

backed off and ordered a government review of policy. The industry won a reprieve, but not for long. A year after the review, the original closure plans had been implemented in full.

There's to be a review this time round too, "to consider the place of coal in our long term energy policy", whatever that policy is. However, it is hard to see how any of the eight initiatives outlined yesterday by John Battle, the Energy Minister, is going to help matters very much. In any case, you have to question whether the Government really has its heart in rescuing this industry, given that some of its environmental objectives can be satisfied by its closure. The betting must still overwhelmingly be that a year down the line, another 5,000 miners will be out of a job.

It would not have been a surprise if the members had been split over the interest rate decision made by the Monetary Policy Committee last month. Economists outside the Bank of England were in disagreement about the need for an increase in rates. As Winston Churchill famously observed, you always get more than one opinion per capita from members of the economics profession. At a time like this when the economy is at a turning point, the range of views is wider than ever.

However, it looks like the instant rumours of a split vote in the Bank of England were nothing more than a cover story put around by those unfortunates in the

City who had bet on no increase. The quarter point move certainly caught many by surprise.

The minutes suggest that there were indeed some nuances of disagreement between the MPC's members. It was the first time that a range of possible economic scenarios requiring different policy reactions - dovish, wait-and-see or hawkish - had been discussed so explicitly. This means, more likely than not, that the members did not fully agree on which was the most plausible. As the minutes note, there is a lot of uncertainty about where growth and inflation are heading.

How comforting. If the seven experts holding the monetary reins could hold different views and still end up with a consensus decision, it means we have grown-ups in charge of monetary policy. Perhaps the quarter point was a compromise between hawks who would have opted for a half point and doves who wanted no change. They debated it and reached a conclusion they could all sign up to.

This is not the stuff of dramatic headlines or even successful gambles in the sterling futures market. A split in the august corridors of the Bank of England would have been more exciting. But it does hold out the hope that the new structure for setting interest rates will indeed deliver the most responsible policy decisions Britain has enjoyed for a long time. Even Sir Winston might have been grudgingly impressed.

TI sale puts French defence commitment in doubt

TI Group yesterday sold its 50 per cent share of Messier-Dowty, its landing-gear business, to its joint-venture partner Snecma after the French state-owned aerospace group ruled out selling its stake. As Peter Thol Larsen reports, the news casts doubt on the French government's commitment to European defence consolidation just a day after France, Britain and Germany called for the creation of a single European defence group.

TI had originally hoped to take full control of Messier-Dowty, which supplies landing gear for commercial aircraft and military jets such as the Eurofighter. But following the change of government in Paris, those hopes were dashed.

"We detected a strong shift of position after the recent

French elections," said the Finance director Martin Angle. "There was no option on the table for us to buy."

As a result, TI decided to sell its stake for £207.7m rather than continue with the joint venture, which was performing poorly despite buoyant demand in the aerospace market. "Messier-Dowty was not capable of producing the returns required by a UK public company," Mr Angle said. "It had to be owned by one party or the other for returns to be maximised."

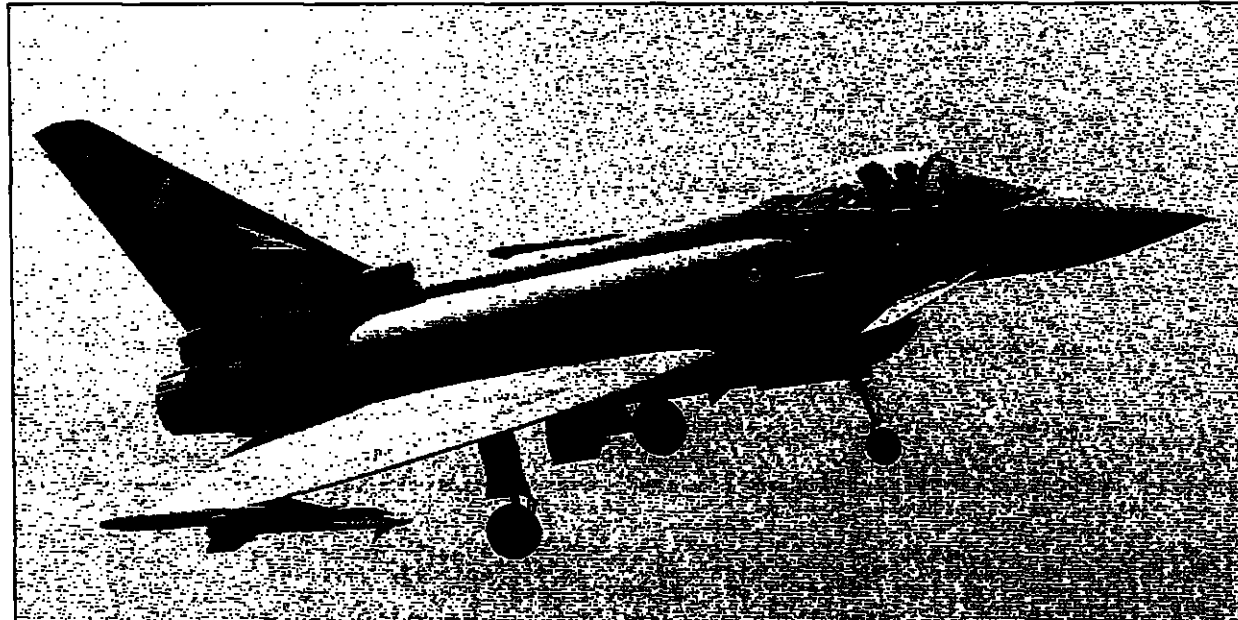
Snecma's refusal to sell appears to contradict the French government's support for cross-border consolidation in the defence industry. Just yesterday President Jacques Chirac and Prime Minister Lionel Jospin put their names to a joint statement with Prime Minister Tony Blair and Chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany calling on the three countries' aerospace and defence industries to "restructure to compete in world markets". The statement asked the industry to come up with an plan and timetable by next March.

Industry experts, who have long been suspicious of the French government's commitment to defence consolidation, were not surprised. "The French government's actions to date suggest they're in the business of building national champions," said one. "They want to get their own house in order before coming to the negotiating table."

TI shares fell 17.5p to 513p as analysts reduced their profit forecasts for the group. "It's a bit disappointing that Messier wasn't going to make the profits we thought it was," said one. "The sale will also reduce TI's profits by about 3 per cent until they reinvest the proceeds."

But other observers broadly welcomed the move. "Messier's performance has been very pedestrian," said one. "It was a question of double or quits."

Mr Angle pointed out that, taking into account disposals and the value of the remaining businesses, TI had enjoyed a healthy return on its investment. The group acquired Dowty for £650m in 1992 after a bitterly fought takeover battle. "We have created some



TI had hoped to take full control of Messier-Dowty, which supplies landing gear for military jets such as the Eurofighter

£400m-£450m of value since then," he said. Following the Messier-Dowty sale, TI still controls Dowty's original polymers division as well as its wholly-owned Dowty Aerospace business, which makes engine rings as well as propellers for

turboprop aircraft and accounts for 20 per cent of TI's sales.

Indeed, TI plans use proceeds of the Messier sale to expand its remaining businesses, including aerospace. Mr Angle said the group was looking at

bolt-on acquisitions for every one of its businesses. "We have discussions going on in every area," he said. The group recently announced that it had taken a 30 per cent stake in Lips, a Dutch manufacturer of marine propulsion systems for

£7m, with an option to buy the remaining 70 per cent until June 1998. Mr Angle said he would be "very disappointed" if the company had not spent the money raised by the Messier-Dowty disposal by the end of 1998.

Nissan attains record car output in North-east

The Japanese car maker Nissan is set to build a record number of cars at its Sunderland plant this year but the strength of sterling is likely to have hit the profitability of the UK operation hard.

Output of the Primera and Micra models from Sunderland will reach 271,500 this year - a 17 per cent increase on the 231,000 cars produced last year - and the highest level of production since 1993.

But because three-quarters of Sunderland's output is exported - mainly to the Continent - profits will have taken a dip from the £28m recorded in 1996 because of exchange rate factors. Production next year is expected to remain at current levels but will begin to rise again in 1999 when a third model goes into production at Sunderland.

Nissan is investing an additional £215m on the plant to begin production of a C-class medium-sized model to replace the Almera. Output will eventually reach 100,000 a year, increasing production from the site to 370,000.

Ian Gibson, chief executive of Nissan Motor Manufacturing UK, said the impact of the strong pound had been partly mitigated by productivity improvements and the high capacity utilisation at Sunderland. Output per employee has risen 10 per cent this year while the production line is working at more than 90 per cent capacity.

Mr Gibson questioned Toyota's decision to build a third model in France rather than expand its Burnaston site near Derby. The rival car manufacturer is investing £400m on a factory in Valenciennes to build a small car to replace the Starlet.

The strategy is to increase sales in France, where Toyota has only 1 per cent of the market, by having a high-profile manufacturing plant in the country. But Mr Gibson said Ford had attempted the same strategy in the 1980s, building an automatic transmission plant in France to improve their French credentials and local sales but it had not made any difference.

— Michael Harrison

Financial crisis in S Korea deepens

South Korea's capital markets were virtually paralysed as a crisis of confidence swept the country's troubled financial industry. The government shut five more shaky merchant banks, bringing the total closed to 14 of 30, and pledged to guarantee the debts of its securities firms.

Korea also threw open its bond market to foreign investors yesterday. The government pledged an all-out effort to normalise operations at the ones that remain, in an attempt to bolster market morale and prevent the banking crisis from driving more companies into insolvency.

Lim Chang-yul, the Finance and Economy Minister, said:

"We had no other choice because [these] banks have been suffering from a run on deposits exceeding 1 trillion won (£404m) each and every day."

The five merchant banks, ordered to close until at least Jan. 31 1998, are Nami Banking Corp, Daehan Investment Banking Corp, Shinhan Investment Bank Corp, Hanwha Merchant Bank Corp and Central Banking Corp. Nine merchant banks were suspended last week and told to find ways to rescue themselves by the end of this month or face permanent closure.

A week after the country accepted emergency credit from the International Monetary Fund, Korea's financial turmoil shows no sign of abating. Even some of Korea's biggest companies cannot raise money in the bond market. The country's currency, the won, fell 10 per cent against the dollar for a second day to a record low of 1,566

with no offers to buy the currency. And commercial banks, some fighting for their own survival, remain reluctant to extend credit after a record 15,000 companies filed for bankruptcy this year.

"It's a game of survival. No one is doing business with anybody," said Milton Kim, president of Sangyong Investment & Securities Co, one of Korea's top five brokerages. Some executives are already questioning whether the \$60bn (£36bn) lifeline arranged by the IMF for the country's bankrupt financial and industrial companies will be enough.

Even some Koreans, who weeks ago bristled at the idea that the IMF might dictate economic policy, now say the government must accept that some of the country's commercial banks and securities companies will not survive. The Korean government may itself be push-

ing more companies over the edge as it tries to save every last bank from closure. Yesterday, it went to the aid of Korea First Bank and Seoul Bank, its two most troubled banks, giving them shares in two top blue-chip companies in return for 59 per cent ownership by the state.

The money markets, where banks would normally raise short-term funds, are frozen as rates have reached their limits set by the government. For overnight money, for example, the rate offered by banks has hit 25 per cent. Banks are not lending to companies, who are finding other money-raising methods cut off as well. Samsung Aerospace Industries, Korea's biggest aircraft components manufacturer, postponed a 50bn won bond sale because there were no takers. A 20bn won bond sale by Daewoo Telecom Co has also been put on hold.

Bank warns of euro chaos as institutions fail to prepare

Insurers and fund managers are lagging behind in their preparations for the euro, according to a report published yesterday by the Bank of England. The Bank also warned that failure to prepare thoroughly for the "Euro Big Bang" at the end of 1998 could result in financial market chaos. Without meticulous planning, "there will be the potential for fraud, and the scope for confusion and error," the Bank said.

According to the report, "Practical Issues Arising from the Introduction of the Euro", banks are well on course for the introduction of the euro on 1 January 1999. But "preparations amongst many fund managers and insurers appear rather less advanced".

John Townsend, deputy director at the Bank of England,

explained that, until now, many fund managers and insurers have relied on banks to take the lead in euro preparations. "They [the fund managers and insurers] need to start thinking for themselves," he said.

Mr Townsend also stressed the importance of preparing for the "Euro Big Bang", the so-called "conversion weekend". Between 31 December 1998 and 4 January 1999, debt issues of countries participating in the first wave of monetary union, as well as some cash accounts, will be converted into euros.

The Bank wants key players in the conversion weekend to start testing their systems by the end of September next year, at the very latest. And it emphasised yesterday that all firms operating in London's wholesale securities market

"need to understand in detail how the conversion weekend is expected to work, to minimise the risk of confusion and error".

The Bank said: "The conversion weekend will be like a simultaneous Big Bang at the wholesale level throughout the European Union, and it is essential that the euro gets off to a good start".

Institutions' resources are being stretched by the dual challenge of preparing for the euro and the year 2000, according to the report.

The Bank yesterday gave its official seal of approval to Chaps euro, a real-time gross settlement system, which will, from 1999, run in parallel with the existing Chaps sterling settlement system.

— Leo Paterson

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THE INVESTMENT COLUMN

EDITED BY SAMEENA AHMAD

Cider makers feel squeezed

The cider industry is in turmoil. Growing competition from the new crop of creamy, smooth beers and alcopops have caused sales to slump. A rise in duty on strong ciders has forced manufacturers to raise prices, causing customers to switch to other tipplers in droves.

All three quoted cider makers, Matthew Clark, Merrydown and HP Bulmer, have seen their shares collapse since the start of the year.

Bulmer added to the gloom yesterday by announcing a 17.5 per cent fall in pre-tax profits to £14.3m in the six months to October. Its shares fell another 15p to 392.5p. A £2.5m increase in the advertising budget for brands such as Strongbow failed to curb the slump in the market. Bulmer predicted the market would rise by 4 per cent in the year to September. In fact it has fallen 7 per cent. Despite Bulmer's assertions that the market has bottomed, the fall in sales that Matthew Clark has experienced in the vital run-up to Christmas suggests that the industry's troubles are far from over.

Bulmer and Matthew Clark are gambling that a further rise in advertising spend will eventually pay off. In the long run, it is hard to argue with the strategy. After all, a dearth of this kind of spending contributed to the industry's problems in the first place.

But the investment may not bear fruit for years and most investors won't want to hang around to find out.

One obvious answer to the cider makers' woes is to join forces. Merrydown is already in the bid spotlight and Matthew Clark and Bulmer should consider a merger, which would allow them to pool their advertising efforts. Given that a tie-up would give the two more than 90 per cent of the UK cider market, this obviously raises monopoly issues. But these are not insurmountable as they could argue cider is in effect competing with the broader beer and lager market.

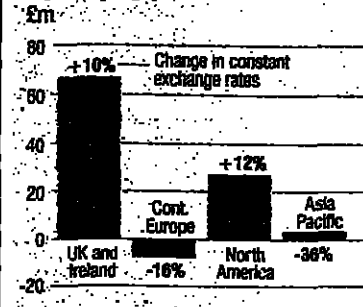
Analysts have cut Bulmer's full-year profit forecasts by £1m to £27m, putting the shares on 12 times forward earnings. Until there are signs of a recovery in the cider market, its shares, which have fallen from 625p in March, still look high enough.

NFC: At a glance

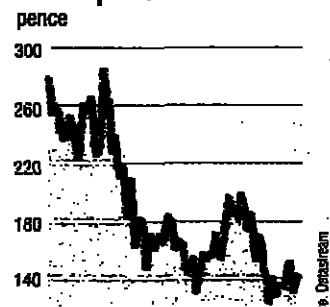
Market value: £1.02bn, share price 145p (+1.5p)

Five-year record	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Turnover (£bn)	1.90	2.06	2.20	2.46	2.41
Pre-tax profits (£m)	104.9	105.6	88.6	105.2	87.8
Earnings per share (p)	15.2	11.2	2.0	8.9	5.7
Dividends per share (p)	6.72	7.10	7.10	7.10	7.10

Operating profits



Share price



NFC heads in the right direction

Has NFC reached a turning point? For the first time since he took the wheel of the transport and logistics group, Gerry Murphy is running what looks like a relatively stable business. True, this has taken two and a half years, during which time the shares have fallen by a fifth. But the absence of any disasters from the full-year results, which showed operating profits from continuing operations rising 4 per cent to £108.6m, suggests the worst may be over.

Most of the restructuring has been done – the £49m charge which dented this year's profits should cover any remaining redundancies. Unprofitable contracts have been terminated and the worst subsidiaries sold. Meanwhile, the UK and US divisions are buoyant – operating profits rose 10 per cent and 12 per cent respectively.

That said, there is much still to do. Losses in continental Europe deepened, mainly due to strikes in France. Turning those businesses around will take time. Meanwhile, management of the Exel Logistics arm is working hard

to increase the "value added" aspects of its service in an attempt to shield itself from cut-throat price competition.

In the name of shareholder value, NFC is also planning to put its £53.4m cash pile – the result of its disposal programme – to better use. The cash may be spent on an acquisition, possibly in the US. However, the group could also hand back £250m to shareholders and keep gearing below 40 per cent.

All this is welcome news. However, with the shares – up 1.5p yesterday to 145p – already on a multiple of 15 times broker Greig Middleton's 1998 earnings forecast, the upside looks limited. Mr Murphy may have successfully halted NFC's decline. But that doesn't mean the company is suddenly going to start generating runaway growth.

Strong pound depresses Smith

Things really are looking dismal when a company starts talking about being open to takeover talks. Peter Williams, chief executive of David S Smith, the paper and packaging group, needs to cheer himself up somehow. The curse

of sterling continues to hang over the company. The strong pound has hit the value of Smith's exports while enticing European paper manufacturers looking for a home for their excess capacity into the UK market, where Smith makes most of its money.

As a result Smith's profits for the half year to November slumped 50 per cent to £29.3m with sales down 10 per cent to £554.8m, half of which was due to sterling.

The sector itself isn't in bad shape. Growth in mail order and home shopping, which uses small boxes, is lifting demand for corrugated paper. And manufacturers are starting to hold back on increasing capacity, though that remains a problem.

However, Mr Williams is right that there needs to be further consolidation in the sector. Though he says the company is not up for sale, he would not be opposed to a takeover. As for buyers? In a global sector take your pick, though buying Smith would make more sense for a non-UK player which hasn't been hammered by sterling. The US's International Paper and Sweden's SCA are two front runners.

UBS is forecasting £55m full-year profits. The shares, down 8.5p to 196.5p, are on a forward p/e ratio of 15 times. Not a buy.

Easy money for merging banks

Will share prices in the UK banking sector continue to defy gravity in 1998? So it would seem, if figures from UBS analyst Mark Howdle are any guide. In his new report "The Urge to Merge", Mr Howdle provides a table which lists the consolidation potential in European banking.

Concentration – the market share of the top five banks – in the UK is calculated at 57 per cent. Return on equity is 21.6 per cent. Now turn to Germany, where concentration is 17 per cent, and return just 8.4 per cent.

Which, crudely, suggests that the fewer banks there are competing on the high street, the easier it is to make money for their shareholders. As the consolidation juggernaut rolls on across the financial sector, investing in the likes of cost-cutting Lloyds TSB and bid-target NatWest looks like a one-way bet.

Record season for Airtours as bookings take off

Airtours, the UK's second-largest tour operator, said yesterday that the holiday market was booming. Andrew Yates finds the strong economy, low unemployment and windfall payments from building societies are fuelling the surge in bookings.

Airtours 1998 summer holiday bookings are 15 per cent higher than last year. The group is also experiencing its busiest Christmas on record and overall winter bookings have risen 11 per cent, with the Canary Islands proving the most popular holiday spot.

David Crossland, Airtours' founder and chairman, said: "This growth is not just coming from windfall payments. The real driver is that people are feeling more secure about their employment."

Customers are also paying higher prices for holidays. "More people are trading up to higher quality accommodation. They are typically paying up to £100 on top of the £400 they

would normally pay," said Mr Crossland. More holiday makers are booking early and paying brochure prices as the tour operators have cut the number of late package deals on offer. However, Airtours' summer holiday prices will fall next year by up to 5 per cent. The strength of the pound has enabled it to secure better deals with local hoteliers.

Long-haul destinations are becoming increasingly popular and Airtours predicted that Mexico would be the sought-after destination in 1998. The number of City breaks holidays sold also rose sharply. Strong demand meant Airtours decided in March to increase the number of breaks on offer to destinations such as Paris, Amsterdam and Rome.

However, last month's tourist massacre near Luxor has shattered the Egyptian holiday market and Airtours has decided to scrap cruising holidays to the country next month.

Mr Crossland said that Airtours had a war chest of £250m for acquisitions. The group is committed to expanding its business in North America despite losing £6.6m over there last year due to start-up losses in the

US and problems in Canada. Airtours is also eyeing up more purchases in Europe, especially in Germany.

Airtours is also likely to invest in expanding its cruising operation by buying a new ship in the near future. The group has been encouraged by the rapid growth in the business which now carries 150,000 people a year from a standing start in 1995.

Airtours, together with US partner Carnival, recently bought Costa Crociere, the world's fourth-largest cruise line, and is planning to pump more money into this business.

Airtours' pre-tax profits were up 39 per cent to £120m for the year to September. However, its shares slipped 32.5p to 1235p. Analysts were disappointed with the performance of its Scandinavian business. Scandinavians stayed at home to enjoy the hottest summer for 300 years, which meant holiday sales grew more slowly than expected.

Airtours does not expect to have to sell Götting Places, its travel agents chain, as a result of a Monopolies and Mergers Commission investigation into links between tour operators and travel agents.

Allied Colloids bids to repel US offer

Allied Colloids, the chemicals group, yesterday pledged to cut costs dramatically and raise operating margins in its bid to repel a £1.1bn hostile takeover approach from Hercules, a US rival.

In its defence document Allied predicted that it could wipe £5m off its raw material bill next year. The group also plans to cut costs by revamping its manufacturing facilities and introducing new technology and IT systems. However, this is likely to lead to job cuts among Allied's 3,900 strong workforce, including some of the 1,900 people it employs in Bradford.

Allied insisted that the 155p-a-share offer drastically undervalued the group given its consistent improvement in sales and an increase in margins in the last six months. John Harnett, Allied Colloids' finance director, said: "We have repositioned ourselves for the battle to come. It is a poke in the eye to Hercules, we just haven't knocked them out yet."

Hercules slammed Allied's defence, claiming it had made flattering comparisons and pointing out that operating profits fell 17 per cent in the last six months compared with the first half of the financial year.

Keith Elliott, chairman and chief executive of Hercules, said: "The Allied Colloids document is uninspiring. Our cash offer continues to look very generous for a stock that has destroyed shareholder value and has consistently underperformed the FTSE All Share and FTSE Chemicals Indices."

Allied refused to comment on whether the group was looking for another bidder to act as a white knight. But sources suggest several rivals have already registered an interest in Allied.

Allied's shares were unmoved at 167p.

— Andrew Yates

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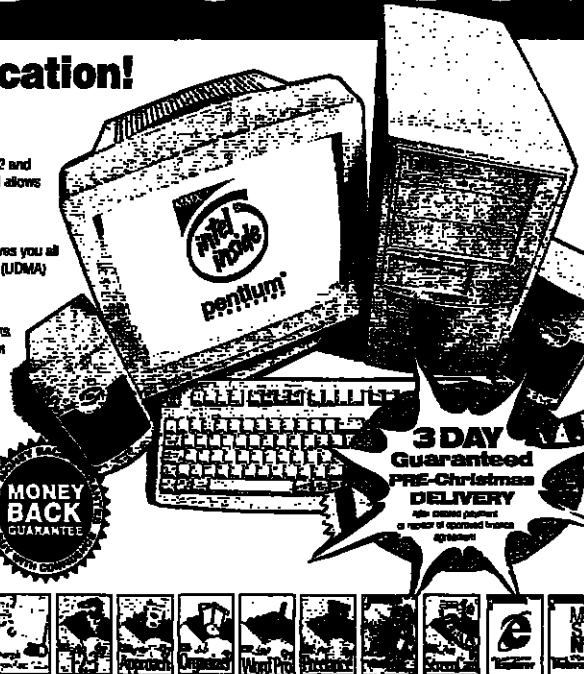
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200M-2 Power Pro PC

- Intel Pentium 200MHz processor with MMX Technology
- 64Mb RAM
- 6.4Gb Ultra ATA hard disk
- 56Kbps modem
- 3D Waveable sound
- 24 speed CD-ROM
- 4Mb advanced graphics
- 3D Waveable sound
- IBM Simply Speaking GOLD voice recognition software
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233M-2 Power Pro PC

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- 6.4Gb Ultra ATA hard disk
- 56Kbps modem
- 3D Waveable sound
- 24 speed CD-ROM
- 4Mb advanced graphics
- 3D Waveable sound
- IBM Simply Speaking GOLD voice recognition software
- Full feature advanced PCTV system with Teletext

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Directors' pay rises moderate, says IoD

Company directors are already showing the kind of pay restraint called for by Gordon Brown, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his pre-Budget statement last month, according to a report out today. But, as Roger Trapp reports, the findings contradict a similar survey published just two weeks ago.

Directors are enjoying rises broadly in line with inflation and the increases for employees as a whole, according to figures published by the Institute of Directors.

The findings of the survey, produced in association with the Reward Group, a consultancy specialising in pay and related benefits, are in marked contrast to those from Monks Partnership, another firm of remuneration advisers.

That showed directors' base salaries rose by 6.3 per cent – or twice the rate of inflation – over the year. Total earnings, including the last annual bonus, but excluding proceeds from long-term incentive plans, share options, pension costs and other benefits in kind, were up by 8.6 per cent.

Tim Melville-Ross, the IoD's director general, explained the

difference by saying pay levels in the majority of businesses were "very different from those seen in some of the previous media coverage, which tended to focus on the very large, quoted companies."

The IoD study indicated that, while the average director's pay rose by 3.5 to 4 per cent, 51 per cent of those surveyed received 3 per cent or less, with 11 per cent receiving no increase at all. Sixty-one per cent of those covered received increases of 4 per cent or less.

He added: "The idea that UK directors are fat cats has always been a myth. There have been some cases of large company, including utility company, directors enjoying excessive rewards. However, the vast majority are in small and medium-sized enterprises working long hours on modest salaries. This latest survey reinforces the moderate way their salaries have been increased in line with inflation and the rest of the workforce."

A managing director of a company with turnover of up to £25m typically had a salary of £52,000 and bonus of £12,000, while those in businesses with turnover of between £25m and £50m could expect a salary of £85,000 and a £20,000 bonus.

In companies with turnover of more than £200m, managing directors' basic salaries rose to an average of £135,000, while bonuses reached £35,000.

Stock Exchange may limit New Year Eve's trading

The London Stock Exchange is today considering whether to alter New Year's Eve trading rules to prevent deals going through SETS, the new electronic trading system, at rogue prices. Concern has been expressed that low trading volumes on 31 December could mean that trades are executed at unrepresentative prices. Closing prices on New Year's Eve are used to calculate fund valuations. Limiting trading to just one hour is one of the solutions being discussed at today's meeting of the Exchange's secondary markets committee.

US payments deficit grows

The strong dollar and the start of the Asian currency crisis drove America's balance of payments deficit to its widest for a year last quarter. According to new Commerce Department figures, the shortfall between exports of goods and services and imports was \$42.16bn, up from \$37.85bn in the April-June quarter. The deterioration – not quite as bad as analysts had feared – was due to a bigger deficit in traded goods. Exports fell in value by nearly \$1bn to \$170.6bn, while imports were \$3.5bn higher at \$222.1bn.

Barclaycard's French plans

Barclaycard, Europe's largest credit card issuer, is to launch a Visa card in France. The move marks the next phase in Barclaycard's European expansion plans. The company already has 650,000 cardholders in Germany. Barclaycard, which has a UK card base of 9 million, will invite French customers to start applying for credit cards from March 1998. The credit card will be the first French Visa card to be available without a bank account.

Rojo ruled out for ECB

Spain has ruled out Luis Angel Rojo, governor of the Bank of Spain, as a candidate for the top position in the European Central Bank (ECB). The Spanish government had previously said Mr Rojo would be presented as a candidate. The withdrawal of Mr Rojo's candidature leaves just Jean Claude Trichet, governor of the Bank of France, and Wim Duisenberg, Germany's favoured candidate in the race for the top ECB post. A spokesperson for the Spanish government said the move was not "meant as a slight" to Mr Rojo.

New accounting standard

The Accounting Standards Board is considering amending its standard on reporting "the substance of transactions" to recognise the accounting difficulties caused by the prevalence of Private Finance Initiative contracts. Sir David Tweedie, chairman of the ASB, explained the body's concern by saying that it was "crucial to ensure that those transactions that give rise to liabilities for the government are reported as such, so that Parliament is not misled over the extent of the payments it is committed to make in the future."

House buyers show caution

Growing job insecurity has made house buyers more cautious and will mean a significant slowdown in the spread of homeownership, according to an influential new report. Job insecurity, social change and the growing burden of student loans will keep future increases in the number of owner-occupiers very low, according to a report published yesterday by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Diane Coyle, page 26

Small print text at the bottom of the advertisement, including terms and conditions.

Safeway tops investors' shopping lists as bid speculation grows

MARKET REPORT



DEREK PAIN

Speculation about a takeover for the Safeway superstore chain intensified as, in busy trading, the shares rose a further 17p to 355p.

In the past few days there has been hectic activity with an array of investors, big and small, seemingly prepared to fill their trolleys in the expectation of a strike.

Asda, which held abortive talks with Safeway, remains the stock market's favoured predator. But other names featured on the list of possibilities include such unlikely contenders as Marks & Spencer and Kingfisher.

Yesterday's Safeway excitement coincided with some bearish comments on industry's leaders, Tesco and J Sainsbury, from Paul Smiddy of Credit Lyonnais Laing.

He believes investors should ditch Sainsbury and

Tesco as the sector is running out of steam. But Asda and Safeway should be held and he raises the possibility of Asda being tempted into a hostile bid. He says Safeway's "dire management performance" must put a new perspective on the "putative merger with Asda".

Safeway was comfortably riding above 400p until last month's profit warning which implied year's results would be little changed at £420m. Mr Smiddy is also keen on Wm Morrison, up 2.5p to a 219p peak, on trading as well as bid prospects. Asda rose 1.25p to 175.5p; Sainsbury fell 6p to 511p and Tesco held at 506p.

Worries about Christmas trading continued to unsettle retailers. Kingfisher's third-quarter figures, left the shares trailing 22.5p to 828.5p although the 10.5 per cent sales

margin profit forecasts higher. But a subdued performance by the Comet electrical retailing off-shoot fused Dixons, off 17p at 618.5p.

The rest of the market had an uneventful session with Footsie off 46.4p to 5,130.7, weighed down by New York and interest rate worries.

Christie's International, the fine art auctioneer where entrepreneur investor Joseph Lewis has a stake approaching 30 per cent, was another caught in bid speculation. On Monday it said talks with an unidentified party had ended. Then came a statement that a "modified" (whatever that means) offer could be under way. The shares rose 31p to 306p. The predator is thought to be rival Sotheby's, itself fearful of receiving a hostile strike, or the reclusive Mr Lewis.

Hard pressed RJB Mining

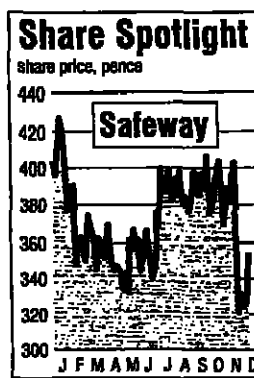
was up 20p to 180p as the generators responded to Westminster pressure and extended their coal supply contracts until June.

A Merrill Lynch downgrading left international trader Incheape off 16.5p at a 186.5p low and engineer GKN lost 46p to 1,264p on BZW caution. ABN Amro Hoare Govett is thought to be near to produc-

ing a downbeat review of Securicor, unchanged at 306.5p.

Grand Metropolitan and Guinness moved ahead as analysts warmed to next week's arrival of Diageo. Merrill Lynch sees the shares reaching 625p over the next year and describe the new cocktail as a "premier player"; Société Générale Strauss Turbulla said the shares are a buy. Grand met rose 6p to 587p and Guinness 5p to 585p. Allied Domecq, following a presentation on its franchise operations, shaded 6p to 535.5p.

Financials remained on a roll, helped by talk of consolidation in Paris with Société Générale thought to be eyeing Paribas, which said it was unaware of any SocGen interest. BNP was also dragged into the speculation. It was enough to help Barclays put on another 26p to 1,665p.



TAKING STOCK

Around 4 per cent of Amine, with oil and gas interests in the former Soviet Union, went through the market, clearing a long-standing overhang. The shares were sold by a Canadian fund which clinched a deal with an institutional investor at 54p against a 60p quote. There is talk the oil group has more encouraging developments in the pipeline.

Waste Recycling firmed to 305p as stockbroker Killick said buy following the takeover of East Waste for £11.9m. The broker believes the deal implies a 350p price.

AIM-listed Compagnie de Participations Financières (Luxembourg), unchanged at 547.5p, is planning to build 38 apartments in Jersey; unusually they will be available to non-residents. Prices will be up to £425,000.

Alcoholic Beverages

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
40	38	Guinness	585.00	+5.00	1.8	12.5	0.00
40	38	Guinness	585.00	+5.00	1.8	12.5	0.00

Banks, Merchant

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

Banks, Retail

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

Breweries Pubs & Rest

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

Building/Construction

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

Building Materials

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

Chemicals

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

Electronics

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

Engineering

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

Food

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

Health Care

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

Insurance

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

Investment Trusts

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

Media

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

Pharmaceuticals

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

Property

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

Retailers

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

Telecommunications

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

Tobacco

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

Transport

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

Waste

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

High Low Stock Price Chg Yld P/E Div

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
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High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
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100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

High Low Stock Price Chg Yld P/E Div

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
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High Low Stock Price Chg Yld P/E Div

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

High Low Stock Price Chg Yld P/E Div

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00
100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

High Low Stock Price Chg Yld P/E Div

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
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100	98	Barclays	1665.00	+25.00	0.8	12.5	0.00

High Low Stock Price Chg Yld P/E Div

High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
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High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Div
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THE INDEPENDENT
THURSDAY 11 DECEMBER 1997
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26/BUSINESS

Time to turn off the subsidies to well-off homeowners



DIANE COYLE
ON FAIRNESS IN THE HOUSING MARKET

The housing market is one of those perennially fascinating subjects of conversation, at least for anybody in the middle of buying or selling. After all, it is one of the most important financial decisions any of us takes, second only to the choice of a pension. It is a big gamble, too, given the violence of typical cycles in house prices.

If you were in a position to buy in the early 1980s, you will still be sitting on a huge capital gain and a large amount of equity. If you bought in 1989, on the other hand, you are one of the losers. It is only recently that the market's recovery has rescued a majority of those people lumbered with negative equity. No wonder house prices rank with the weather as one of the British obsessions.

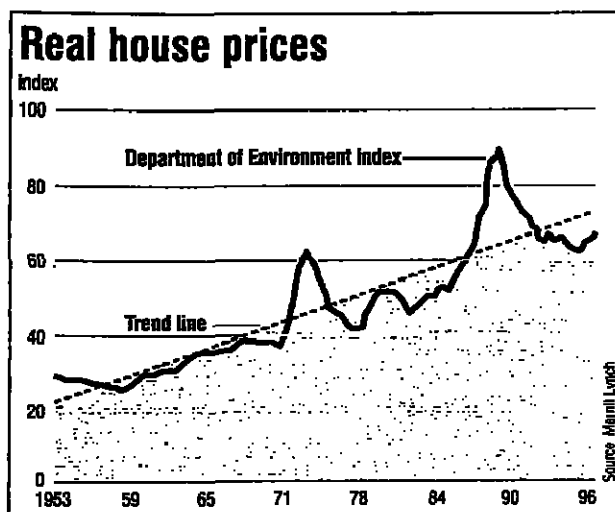
New forecasts this week predict a slower increase in prices next year after the mini-boom of 1997. Both the Nationwide building society and economists at investment bank Merrill Lynch put the likely increase in 1998 at 6.7 per cent after a rise in the region of 10 per cent this year. Even the slower pace will represent a healthy performance compared with underlying inflation likely to be less than 3 per cent.

But prospects in this particular house price cycle, which will depend on how far interest rates need to climb to keep inflation low, are less interesting than the outlook for homeowners in 10 or 20 years' time. A report published yesterday by the Joseph Rowntree foundation addresses the long-term issues and, in particular, what policies the Government should be considering to ensure the sustainability of home ownership.

One of the key factors is the expected rise in the number of households. With a growing number of smaller households, demand for homes is forecast to rise by something over 4 million between now and 2016. This compares with an existing housing stock of just under 25 million dwellings. If this 16 per cent increase does materialise, it will be similar in size to the addition to housing that has occurred during the past 20 years.

It is not too surprising to find that a rise in demand on this scale has been accompanied by a 40 per cent increase in house prices in real, inflation-adjusted terms despite the slump in the early 1990s. The economics of long-term housing trends are straightforward. Demand is rising, real incomes are growing, yet the supply of land is more or less fixed. In the long term, you would expect real house prices to grow at about the same rate as real incomes, or 2.5 per cent a year. This is exactly the prediction of Merrill Lynch's economic model.

There are several reasons why this should concern the Government, as the Rowntree report spells out. One is how to meet the demand for housing from those who will not be able to buy their own home. While the rate of ownership might edge higher, it is already high in the UK compared with many other countries. The Government and local planning authorities therefore need to consider how to increase the



supply of both social and private rented housing. Although Labour's manifesto promised to allow local authorities to release 25bn new housing for new housing, many housing experts fear the amount actually made available will be smaller. Current plans for spending of £900m by the end of 1998/99, implying a surge to £1.4bn a year after that if the pledge is to be fulfilled – and even that might not be enough to plug the gap.

There is also very little discussion in policy circles about how the availability of private rented accommodation could be increased, even though there is a clear gap between the two extremes of the commitment of ownership and the need for subsidised social housing.

A second question is how to adapt the housing market to changes in the jobs market. While employment has become more flexible – or insecure – the patterns of paying off a mortgage have not changed. Most borrowers have loans with a variable rate, likely to rise precisely when the risk of unemployment increases. The two safety nets – private insurance and housing benefit – are full of gaping holes. The private insurance is

expensive and least likely to be on offer to those at most risk of interruptions to their income. The soaring housing benefit bill is on the Government's target list of social security spending for the chop. One suggestion is that it will be capped.

Some alternative is needed to avoid a fresh surge in repossessions during every recession. The Rowntree report suggests two policies: redirecting the £3.5bn a year spent on mortgage interest tax relief and income support for mortgage interest into a mortgage protection premium for low-income households; and giving a subsidy for vulnerable buyers to take out fixed-rate mortgages.

Certainly, some kind of government backing for insurance will be part of the solution. So will an element of redistribution, for those at highest risk are those who can least afford to take out insurance. The rates charged for insuring low-risk borrowers will have to subsidise the premiums paid by high-risk borrowers.

Beyond these pragmatic considerations there are, too, questions of distribution and fairness. Although the share of housing in total personal wealth has shrunk, in the long term a

home will continue to be an appreciating asset.

In the late 1980s, there was much interest in the creation of a new category of the wealthy, those who inherited their parents' homes, especially in London and the South-east. The attention has faded, but the phenomenon has not. As real house prices continue to rise over the years, the wealth penalty for being off the homeownership ladder will grow.

The Rowntree report recommends taxing capital gains on principal homes as the best way to address this. But an alternative approach to the fairness or exclusion issue would be for the Government to formalise the use of housing equity to pay for long-term care or health costs.

If it could ever get round the inevitable middle-class outcry, this could free government funds to pay for the same benefits for lower-income households. But a recent report from the Council of Mortgage Lenders on the potential for "equity-release" loans – offering cash in return for title to the property – notes that the tax system, DSS rules and consumer credit regulations all pose serious constraints.

The underlying message is that the shortage of supply and the uncertainties of the modern labour market mean housing policies will need to do something really controversial. They will have to stop subsidising the well-off through Miras, the capital gains tax exemption, and even health and social security spending on those with a high-value property asset, in order to direct resources to the minority who can not buy their own castle.

"Fixed Commitments, Uncertain Incomes: sustainable occupation and the economy" by Duncan MacLennan, Geoff Meen, Kenneth Gibb and Mark Stephens. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, £11.95 + £1.50 p&p, 01904 430033.

PEOPLE & BUSINESS

JOHN WILLCOCK



Don Cruickshank, director-general of Ofcom, is planning to write a book on his experiences in the media and telecoms industry. I can exclusively reveal. The telecoms regulator hosted a final drinks party for the industry yesterday at Ofcom's offices in Ludgate Hill to mark Mr Cruickshank's imminent departure next year.

The nervous author said his only worry was: "I'm not sure if there's a market for a boring telecoms book." Such modesty. He added that he's taking a "gap year" off when he leaves Ofcom. Questioned further, he became very coy about his future.

Whatever he does, he said that he definitely won't be doing anything in the media or telecoms area for at least a year, as such a potential conflict of interest would offend his personal morality. (It's just as well he didn't go into politics.)

His successor at the helm of Ofcom has not been decided yet, although telecoms aficionados say a shortlist of hopefuls is to be drawn up before Christmas.

Amongst the crowd sipping lukewarm white wine at the Ofcom shindig were Mike Grabner, chief executive of freshly floated Energis, and Chris Gent, head of Vodafone. There was also a gaggle of civil servants from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

Mr Cruickshank didn't say what he was going to call his book. How about "Making the pips squeak"?

Sir David Rowland isn't going to write a book about his few tempestuous years at the head of Lloyd's of London, as far as I know. He is, however, going to take over as the next President of Templeton College, Oxford University's graduate management college. When he dons his mortar board he will be working closely with the newly founded Said Business School, which has close links to Templeton. While the

latter, founded in the 1960s with a donation from British-born fund manager John Templeton, will concentrate on postgraduate teaching and links with the business world, the Said school will mostly deal with MBAs.

Having turned around the near-bankrupt insurance market in Lime Street, will Sir David regret swapping the world of Mammon for that of Academe, I asked?

"I'm 64 years old. My time at Lloyd's has been an extraordinary experience. I'm absolutely sure its time for another leader better than me. I'm just lucky that I'm going to do something so interesting."

Moving from the dreaming spires to the city of Liverpool, a former Beatles drummer has been made chairman of the trustees of the National Museums & Galleries on Merseyside (NMGMS).

No, it's not Ringo, it's David McDonnell, national managing partner of Grant Thornton, the accountancy firm. When he was at school in Liverpool Mr McDonnell played the drums twice with the fledgling Quarrymen, a skiffle group who later became the Beatles.

Mr McDonnell claims to have been "roughed up" by fellow pupil John Lennon while attending Quarry Bank School. No doubt the young Lennon got irritated by Mr McDonnell's constant references to continental liabilities and the like.

Talking of auditors, while the usual pundits have been expressing various degrees of shock and outrage at the revelation that most of South Korea's giant conglomerates have never been independently audited, I see an opportunity for UK PEs.

The Korean economy may have gone pear-shaped recently thanks to the currency crisis, but it's enjoyed double-digit growth rates for the last couple of decades. Therefore, why don't we scrap the requirement for independent audits in the UK and unleash a similar burst of growth here? That would save Britain an estimated £4.3bn in audit fees a year (figures from International Accounting Bulletin).

And it gets better. When our "Korean style" boom inevitably goes phut we can rely on the IMF to bail us out. We had a dry run with the boys from the Fund in the 1970s. Think about it, no more accountants...

Is Bradford & Bingley Building Society's much vaunted commitment to mutualism weakening? The society has appointed Ruth Blake, formerly marketing director of Cable & Wireless, to be its new commercial director. Ms Blake, 38, previously spent four years with Virgin Atlantic and five years with the DMB&B advertising group.

I find it hard to believe that such a commercial life-wire has really been taken on to maintain B&B's traditional worthy-but-dull image. My bet is a conversion announcement in the new year.

Foreign Exchange Rates

Country	Sterling	Spot	1 month	3 months	Dollar	Spot	1 month	3 months	D-Mark	Spot	1 month	3 months
UK	100.00	245.32	245.32	245.32	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65
Australia	20.21	20.21	20.21	20.21	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65
Belgium	60.88	60.88	60.88	60.88	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65
Canada	2.34	2.34	2.34	2.34	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65
Denmark	11.27	11.27	11.27	11.27	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65
France	148.90	148.90	148.90	148.90	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65
Germany	8.95	8.95	8.95	8.95	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65
Greece	336.56	336.56	336.56	336.56	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65
Hong Kong	2.24	2.24	2.24	2.24	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65
Ireland	13.40	13.40	13.40	13.40	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65
Italy	2.36	2.36	2.36	2.36	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65
Japan	108.22	108.22	108.22	108.22	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65
Malaysia	3.80	3.80	3.80	3.80	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65
Netherlands	3.20	3.20	3.20	3.20	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65
New Zealand	2.73	2.73	2.73	2.73	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65
Norway	11.92	11.92	11.92	11.92	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65
Portugal	301.00	301.00	301.00	301.00	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65
South Africa	6.82	6.82	6.82	6.82	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65
Spain	166.36	166.36	166.36	166.36	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65
Sweden	8.46	8.46	8.46	8.46	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65
Switzerland	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65
US	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65	100.00	1.65	1.65	1.65

Other Spot Rates

Country	Sterling	Dollar	Country	Sterling	Dollar
Argentina	12.40	100.00	Iran	0.5346	100.00
Brazil	1.25	100.00	Israel	0.5346	100.00
Canada	1.25	100.00	Japan	0.5346	100.00
Chile	1.25	100.00	South Korea	0.5346	100.00
Czech Rep	1.25	100.00	Taiwan	0.5346	100.00
Denmark	1.25	100.00	Thailand	0.5346	100.00
France	1.25	100.00	Turkey	0.5346	100.00
Germany	1.25	100.00	USA	0.5346	100.00
Greece	1.25	100.00			
Hong Kong	1.25	100.00			
India	1.25	100.00			
Indonesia	1.25	100.00			
Italy	1.25	100.00			
Japan	1.25	100.00			
Korea	1.25	100.00			
Malaysia	1.25	100.00			
Netherlands	1.25	100.00			
New Zealand	1.25	100.00			
Norway	1.25	100.00			
Portugal	1.25	100.00			
Spain	1.25	100.00			
Sweden	1.25	100.00			
Switzerland	1.25	100.00			
USA	1.25	100.00			

Interest Rates

UK	Germany	US	Japan
Base Rate 5.25%	Discount 5.00%	Discount 5.00%	Discount 5.00%
Prime 6.00%	Prime 5.50%	Prime 5.50%	Prime 5.50%
3 month 5.00%	3 month 4.50%	3 month 4.50%	3 month 4.50%
6 month 5.00%	6 month 4.50%	6 month 4.50%	6 month 4.50%
1 year 5.00%	1 year 4.50%	1 year 4.50%	1 year 4.50%
2 year 5.00%	2 year 4.50%	2 year 4.50%	2 year 4.50%
3 year 5.00%	3 year 4.50%	3 year 4.50%	3 year 4.50%
4 year 5.00%	4 year 4.50%	4 year 4.50%	4 year 4.50%
5 year 5.00%	5 year 4.50%	5 year 4.50%	5 year 4.50%
10 year 5.00%	10 year 4.50%	10 year 4.50%	10 year 4.50%
15 year 5.00%	15 year 4.50%	15 year 4.50%	15 year 4.50%
20 year 5.00%	20 year 4.50%	20 year 4.50%	20 year 4.50%
25 year 5.00%	25 year 4.50%	25 year 4.50%	25 year 4.50%
30 year 5.00%	30 year 4.50%	30 year 4.50%	30 year 4.50%
35 year 5.00%	35 year 4.50%	35 year 4.50%	35 year 4.50%
40 year 5.00%	40 year 4.50%	40 year 4.50%	40 year 4.50%
45 year 5.00%	45 year 4.50%	45 year 4.50%	45 year 4.50%
50 year 5.00%	50 year 4.50%	50 year 4.50%	50 year 4.50%
55 year 5.00%	55 year 4.50%	55 year 4.50%	55 year 4.50%
60 year 5.00%	60 year 4.50%	60 year 4.50%	60 year 4.50%
65 year 5.00%	65 year 4.50%	65 year 4.50%	65 year 4.50%
70 year 5.00%	70 year 4.50%	70 year 4.50%	70 year 4.50%
75 year 5.00%	75 year 4.50%	75 year 4.50%	75 year 4.50%
80 year 5.00%	80 year 4.50%	80 year 4.50%	80 year 4.50%
85 year 5.00%	85 year 4.50%	85 year 4.50%	85 year 4.50%
90 year 5.00%	90 year 4.50%	90 year 4.50%	90 year 4.50%
95 year 5.00%	95 year 4.50%	95 year 4.50%	95 year 4.50%
100 year 5.00%	100 year 4.50%	100 year 4.50%	100 year 4.50%

Bond Yields

Country	3m	6m	1yr	2yr	3yr	5yr	10yr	15yr	20yr
Australia	0.00	4.98	0.00	5.33	0.04	5.88	0.04	6.21	0.05
Belgium	3.84	0.01	4.91	0.00	4.28	0.01	5.01	0.03	5.54
Canada	3.73	0.02	4.91	0.01	5.33	0.02	5.88	0.04	6.21
ECU	4.54	0.01	4.91	0.00	4.28	0.01	5.01	0.03	5.54
France	0.00	0.00	3.88	0.00	4.42	0.01	4.98	0.01	5.33
Germany	3.73	0.02	4.91	0.01	5.33	0.02	5.88	0.04	6.21
Italy	3.73	0.02	4.91	0.01	5.33	0.02	5.88	0.04	6.21
Japan	0.00	0.00	3.88	0.00	4.42	0.01	4.98	0.01	5.33
Netherlands	3.73	0.02	4.91	0.01	5.33	0.02	5.88	0.04	6.21
Portugal	3.73	0.02	4.91	0.01	5.33	0.02	5.88	0.04	6.21
Spain	3.73	0.02	4.91	0.01	5.33	0.02	5.88	0.04	6.21
Sweden	3.73	0.02	4.91	0.01	5.33	0.02	5.88	0.04	6.21
Switzerland	3.73	0.02	4.91	0.01	5.33	0.02	5.88	0.04	6.21
UK	3.73	0.02	4.91	0.01	5.33	0.02	5.88	0.04	6.21
USA	3.73	0.02	4.91	0.01	5.33	0.02	5.88	0.04	6.21

Money Market Rates

Fund	Sell	Buy	Yld	Fund	Sell	Buy	Yld
Emerg Mkts Eura	126.70	127.30	2.58	Pacific Index	34.76	34.76	2.88X
Europe Growth Acc	409.00	439.20	0.00	UK Index	96.80	96.80	2.51X
Europe Divd Acc	325.60	400.00	0.00	UK Ind Acc	18.00	97.96	2.81X
Growth Distr	71.34	76.08	0.00	UK Recovers	138.20	138.20	1.60X
Income Acc	265.20	262.80	4.20	UK Small Cos	160.20	160.20	1.09
UK Govt Secs	12.00	12.44	0.00				
UK Govt Corp	12.00	13.50	1.89				

...lla able to
progress
from position
strength

That is selling Bremner short. I don't know where he fits in the pantheon of outstanding footballers, but as Ramsey said all those years ago, he could play. Couldn't he just.

West Indies is the prize for rookie captain Hollioake

Photograph: Reuters

of the publishers to have at least acknowledged the existence of Dallaglio's collaborator, Barry Newcombe, the former *Sunday Express* correspondent. After all, it was Newcombe who wrote the thing and he delivered a very decent manuscript.

FOOTBALL

Villa able to progress from position of strength

Aston Villa kept English interest in the Uefa Cup alive until next spring by seeing off Steaua Bucharest. What's more, says Phil Shaw, they played with the head as well as the heart.

First came Bordeaux, then Bilbao and now Steaua. No wonder Brian Little, on being asked who he hoped Aston Villa might be paired with in the draw for the Uefa Cup quarter-finals next Wednesday, quipped: "Blazio, would be nice."

The possibilities for Villa, after their 3-2 aggregate defeat of Steaua, are mouth-watering. Apart from Lazio, Internazionale advanced by overturning a 2-0 deficit against Strasbourg, while Spartak Moscow, Auxerre and the holders, Schalke 04, also lie in wait. Villa need fear no one. Since last season's embarrassingly early exit against Helsingborgs of Sweden, they have clearly learned the importance of patience and possession. Even with only 20 minutes of the tie remaining, and the Romanians clinging to a 2-1 first-leg lead, they maintained shape and discipline.

As chances went begging, Villa might have been tempted to wonder whether the absence of Dwight Yorke would be critical after all. Suddenly, they scored through Savo Milosevic, who also contributed the winner against Bordeaux, and Ian Taylor's late breakthrough meant

Villa did not have to rely on their away goal.

Milosevic, whose first name is chanted mockingly on Midlands grounds when a striker miscues badly, is frequently linked with moves abroad. Benfica are the latest to declare an interest. Yet on Wednesday's form the Yugoslav is an asset, and he certainly talked as if expects to be around for the next round in March.

"Villa Park is becoming a place to be feared when clubs come here in Europe," Milosevic said. "Nobody will want to draw us when they see the quality of the teams we've put out. Our second-half performance was probably our best as a team all season."

As heroes and Villans go, Taylor is of the unsung variety. When Villa last played in the quarter-finals, 20 years ago, he watched from the Holte End as they went out to Barcelona. Five years ago, he was still working as a forklift-truck driver and turning out for Moor Green. Having scored at home to Bilbao, he could have had a hat-trick against Steaua.

Little said: "I thought about keeping the 11 who finished against Coventry, with young Lee Hendrie in for Dwight. But Ian was free from suspension and he's so important to us in Europe. He gets a foot in and breaks the game up in midfield as well as getting forward so well."

Villa will have scant opportunity to rest on their laurels. Their perplexingly indifferent Premiership campaign resumes next Monday at Manchester United.

Charlton sack Stuart after he admits taking cocaine

Charlton have sacked Jamie Stuart after the player admitted taking cocaine and marijuana after failing a drugs test earlier this month. Alan Curshley, the Charlton manager, said "the shadow of suspicion" hanging over the rest of the club left him with no option.

However, Gordon Taylor, chief executive of the Professional Footballers' Association, said: "We do not want to encourage the sledgehammer approach of terminating the contract of a player who has tested positive for drugs. We feel it is a dangerous precedent for other clubs to follow, as we believe they should be looking to help rehabilitate players."

Everton's hopes of exchanging Andy Hinchcliffe for Derby's Dean Sturridge may have hit a stumbling block because the Derby manager, Jim Smith, rates his forward as £2m better than the Goodison Park defender. A £4m deal had been suggested, but Smith said yesterday that he would want cash as well.

Across the city, Liverpool are giving Neil Harris a week's trial to assess a possible £100,000 move from Cambridge City. The

club is also almost certain to appeal against the Department of Employment's decision to refuse the United States goalkeeper Brad Friedel a work permit.

John Aldridge, Tranmere's player-manager, has signed a two-year extended contract which will keep him at Prenton Park until June 2000.

John Hollins has been confirmed as assistant to the new Queen's Park Rangers manager, Ray Harford. Hollins stepped up from his position as reserve-team coach to act as caretaker manager after the departure of Stewart Houston last month.

Middlesbrough's Craig Harrison has escaped a three-match ban after referee Mike Fletcher admitted he should not have sent him off at Ipswich last Tuesday.

Sheffield Wednesday are giving a free transfer to the Slovenian international striker Primož Glavač, while the bottom-placed Premiership side, Barnsley, have taken a 24-year-old Estonian international, Marek Lemsalu, on a week's trial.

Bristol City have put their leading scorer, Shaun Goater, on the transfer list after he rejected a new contract.



Colin Jackson watches Tatum Nelson, a student at Bath, training yesterday. Both are benefiting from the university's athletics facilities. Photograph: Peter Jay

Bath's model environment for elite athletes

Britain's former chief coach, Malcolm Arnold, is buying a house in Bath. So is Colin Jackson, the 110m hurdles world record holder. Mike Rowbottom finds out why.

There is a sign which greets every competitor who enters the £6m Sports Training Village at Bath University: "Sydney Olympics 2000. Will you be there?"

Yesterday's launch of an elite athletics programme at the university confirmed that Colin Jackson will be among those getting a regular view of this written challenge.

Jackson is relocating from Cardiff to work more closely with his coach, Malcolm Arnold, who recently left his job as the performance director for British Athletics to assume charge of the new programme at Bath.

And Jackson's response to the Olympic question is an unequivocal "yes".

As far as the 30-year-old former world champion is concerned, what is happening to him now feels like a fresh start after a period of time when his enthusiasm for the sport hit an all-time low.

"Mentally, I feel like I am returning after two years off," he said. "In a way, it has extended my career."

The roots of Jackson's disillusionment lay in the events of 1995, when he was one of several top athletes, including Linford Christie, who were in dispute with the British Athletics Federation over appearance fees. In Jackson's case, there was a big row with the then head of the BAF, Peter Radford, after which Jackson vowed never to run in Britain again.

It was a measure of Jackson's disillusionment that he had an operation two months ago to remove cartilage in his knee which had been troubling him for nearly two years.

"I should have been done 18 months ago," he said. "But when I got injured again, I thought: 'It doesn't matter, I don't have that much of a career for the sport any more'. Get-

ting it done was a big positive sign for me."

The 1996 Olympics were a disappointment, but he roused himself to earn an unexpected silver medal at this summer's World Championships.

His Athens performance was a reaction to a set of circumstances which left him facing the same problems. He has responded in two ways.

He no longer has a connection with Nuff Respect, the marketing company he set up with Christie, because he says it was taking up too much of his mental energy.

And he has now realigned himself on a permanent basis with the coach who guided his career from its earliest days.

"I had a number of facilities available in Cardiff, but the main problem was that I didn't have my coach there," Jackson said. "It is difficult when you are training on your own - even though you can follow a specific programme you are not sure whether you are doing things right."

"I have always wanted to be part of something like this, which is being developed

along the same lines as colleges in the United States, where all your requirements - track, weights, sports medicine - are in the same place."

Jackson is one of four athletes so far recruited to what will be an elite group of 12 at the facility, which was funded by the National Lottery and commercial sponsorship. The others are sprint hurdler Jacqui Aggepong, Allison Curshley, the 21-year-old who is attempting to fill the gap Sally Gunnell has left in 400m hurdles, and Ian Mackie, the British 100m champion.

Also taking advantage of the facilities is 18-year-old Tatum Nelson, ranked in the top four European juniors at 100m, who is studying for a BSc in Sociology alongside her athletics training.

Bath was unsuccessful in its bid to become the site for Britain's proposed National Academy of Sport, but is awaiting an invitation to become one of the main regional satellites within the new framework.

It has already put itself on the sporting map by hosting the 1995 Youth Olympics and,

in the last year, providing a base for the national swimming coach, Ian Turner, and six Olympic swimmers, including silver medalist Paul Palmer.

If Bath can work for the athletes like it has worked for Palmer, then everyone will be happy. "Being here has dramatically changed everything for me," said Palmer, who added two golds and a bronze to his collection at the European Championships this year.

Back home in Lincolnshire, the 23-year-old was having to get up to train at 6am in a 25m school swimming pool, in order to avoid the children who populated it during the day. Things have now changed. "The public have to fit in with us at the pool we have here," he said. "I can train at any time I want to."

The athletics programme is being set up in the same way as the swimming, encompassing all levels from the elite down to a scheme for talented youngsters. As a model, it echoes those pioneered in eastern Europe 20 years ago, as Palmer acknowledges. "It's like East Germany without the drugs," he said.

RUGBY UNION

Carling dropped by Quins

Will Carling, the former England captain, has been dropped by Harlequins for their London derby with Wasps on Saturday.

Carling has failed to attend Quins' training sessions in recent weeks, during which time he has been ill, and the Quins coach, Andy Keast, said: "We have a strict policy that first-team players must train regularly with their colleagues. We're professionals now and practice needs to be 100 per cent without absences."

Northampton's Nick Beal will be out of action for three months after undergoing surgery on both his legs. Beal had repairs carried out to a torn tendon in his right knee and shin splints in his left leg.

Gloucester have signed the Newbury wing Brian Johnson

on loan and plan to thrust the prolific try-scorer straight into Allied Dunbar Premiership action at Newcastle on Sunday.

Bath have recalled their transfer-listed England A player Richard Butler for the Premiership game against the leaders, Saracens, at Watford. Butler plays as Mike Catt is still recovering from concussion suffered during England's defeat by South Africa 11 days ago.

European Conference organisers have announced that the final on 1 February will be staged in England if Newcastle Falcons beat Agen on Saturday week. Headingly, home to Leeds rugby league club, has been chosen as a provisional venue, although if Falcons lose, the final will be staged in France.

TENNIS

Graf returns for Australia

Steffi Graf, the former world No 1, confirmed yesterday she will use next month's Australian Open as the platform to relaunch her faltering career.

Graf, winner of the event four times, missed the second half of this year with a knee injury, and her ranking has slid to 28.

Graf will join the defending champion, Martina Hingis, the four-times winner Monica Seles, and the American Venus Williams, the US Open finalist, at Melbourne Park from 19 January.

All the men's top 10 will appear, with defending champion and world No 1, Pete Sampras, and Australia's US Open winner, Pat Rafter, at the head of the list.

EQUESTRIANISM

Millennium's new kind of show

A new equestrian fixture, to be held annually at Birmingham's National Exhibition Centre, is already scheduled for the next millennium. Initially called "Pageant 2000, incorporating the New Millennium Horse Show" (subsequent titles will be updated to give the year in which the event takes place) it is due to run from 3 to 6 August, 2000.

Jon Phillips, managing director of the event, is aiming to "redesign" horse shows for the 21st century. "This will not be a horse show as people have come to expect but a show with horses - equestrian entertainment," Phillips said.

Plans include an indoor cross-country competition, over a course which Mike Tucker has agreed to design, using two (or

possibly three) of the NEC halls. The course would also be used to stage contests for other disciplines, such as driving and working hunter classes.

Phillips will be working towards "the Wimbledon principle" for show jumping, so that a champion emerges on the final day. The climax will be run on the World Championship formula, with the finalists riding their own and each other's horses.

This brave new venture is likely to cost £1.5m to stage. Phillips, known to the equestrian world through his horsebox and rescue company, believes that it will be largely self-financing, with sponsors for individual classes and displays.

— Genevieve Murphy

BASKETBALL

Travel takes heavy toll of Towers

Leicester City Riders' status as underdogs in the semi-finals of the Sainsbury's Classic Cola National Cup is undermined by the punishing schedule being endured by their opponents, London Towers.

Towers, the Budweiser League leaders, stay favourites to eliminate Riders, currently 10th. But both tonight's first leg at Wembley and next week's second leg will be played within 24 hours of London's return from sapping and now pointless trips in the European Cup.

London returned yesterday from an 85-70 defeat in Hungary against Honved Budapest, having already failed to qualify for the knock-out stage after losing eight of their nine group games.

Next week Leicester have home advantage the day after London return from completing their European travels against Rhondorf in Germany.

Typically, the Riders coach, Bob Donewald, refuses to pump up his team's chances: "I think we're in over our heads, but we just have to come out and fight. We definitely need to produce more than we have against London in the past."

Riders are appearing in their first semi-final in five years, whereas Towers' coach, Kevin Cadle, is attempting to win the cup for the fifth time in nine years.

Derby Storm have completed the registration of the 6ft 9in Canadian, Brendon Graves, to replace DeRon Rutledge, who has failed to recover from injury. Graves will make his debut on Saturday at home to Towers, their third game in five days.

— Richard Taylor

SAILING

Conner's fear of Whitbread

A warning that the America's Cup is in danger of losing its pre-eminent position to the British-founded Whitbread Round the World Race has come from Dennis Conner.

"I can see the Whitbread taking over from the America's Cup as the premier event in the world of yacht racing," said the man known as "Mr America's Cup", who is in Fremantle to see his yacht, Toshiba, start the third leg of the Whitbread on Saturday.

"There's a huge void that the America's Cup used to fill, so the top spot is there for the taking," he said, expressing dissatisfaction at the television package that has been put together for the next cup in late 1999/2000. The package is making it difficult to attract sponsors which could sink many syndicates.

Conner was sceptical about his own ability to raise the cash needed to be on the start line for the elimination trials due to begin in October 1999. The syndicates have only until September next year to put the bulk of the budget in place. "By then we will know who is not in," he said.

A third Frenchman is to join the Whitbread race leader, Innovation Kvaerner. Sebastian Destremieu will line alongside Pierre Mass and Jacques Vincent for the leg to Sydney, following the departure of Ian Walker.

— Stuart Alexander

SPORTING DIGEST

Badminton
WORLD GRAND PRIX FINALS (Jakarta, Indonesia) Men's singles Group A: Gade Pradipratomo (Indo) 15-10, 15-12; Luo Yun (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group B: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group C: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group D: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group E: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group F: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group G: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group H: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group I: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group J: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group K: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group L: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group M: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group N: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group O: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group P: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group Q: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group R: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group S: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group T: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group U: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group V: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; Group W: Li Jianbo (China) 15-12, 15-10; 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FOOTBALL

Divisions appear as clubs seem split on future of the League

A club chairman has raised fears that a proposed new First Division "Superleague" could see teams playing each other up to seven times a season.

Ian Rodgers reports.

The prospect of supporters getting bored with seeing the same old opposition was yesterday raised by the Colchester chairman, Gordon Parker, in the light of the proposed break-away.

One plan to change the Football League would see a First Division of just 12 teams playing each other four times in League matches, and Parker is concerned that supporters might tire of seeing the same opponents in action.

He said: "Personally, I don't like the idea of playing teams four times a season. And it could be more if you end up drawing the same teams in the League Cup, FA Cup and Auto Windscreens competition."

"With regional draws, conceivably we could end up playing somebody like Cambridge seven times in one season - and that doesn't count replays."

Parker is also worried that the bigger clubs will be taking more than their fair share. "With the Premiership having sucked the really serious money out of football, it leaves a

much smaller cake for everybody else in the game," he said. "If you damage the roots of a plant too much, it eventually withers. And I think we are in danger of doing that at the moment."

"There is going to come a day when the rich men involved in smaller clubs are going to say: 'Enough is enough'. That is a much more serious issue."

Other chairmen, however, are backing the plan. Geoffrey Richmond, the Bradford City chairman, said a First Division "Superleague" of 12 teams from 1999-2000 would be "a tremendous showpiece".

Richmond was a member of the working party which offered various proposals for the future of the leagues below Premier level. But he added that this was only one of a number of new ideas offered.

"This is one of just four we are putting forward," Richmond said yesterday. "We are not recommending one single one. With my Bradford City hat on, I think this is extremely exciting."

"It will provide a tremendous showpiece league for the Football League. The member clubs of the new league will mathematically have an outstanding chance of promotion - three chances in 12."

But Richmond denied claims that the new league would be like the Scottish Premier Division, which has been described as becoming stale.

He said: "Unlike the Scottish Premier, where clubs are playing virtually the same teams four times a year every season, there will be six new members of the 'Superleague' every year. You are going to have a fresh division constantly."

"We believe it will be a very exciting product as regards television and the fans will respond to it."

The proposal will be discussed by Football League chairman at a meeting in London today. It still has to go before the rest of the league and the results of a vote at an EGM in February will decide if the scheme is to go ahead.

In Scotland, the Celtic striker Darren Jackson found his scoring touch at Aberdeen on Tuesday night, but then said: "There are no excuses for me now."

Jackson completed a remarkably swift return from brain surgery in early September with the second of Celtic's two goals in an assured victory at Pittodrie.

It was his first start since 23 August, when he scored in another 2-0 win, this time at St Johnstone, just before the Uefa Cup return game with Tirol.

But, just before the match on 26 August, Jackson developed a headache. At first it was a gentle throb, but it deteriorated into a pounding migraine, which forced him to seek medical advice. The Scotland forward was told he had hydrocephalus, fluid on the brain, and he could either be treated or end his career.

Since the operation, Jackson has chalked up several milestones - returning to training, playing and scoring for the reserves, then appearing as a Celtic substitute.

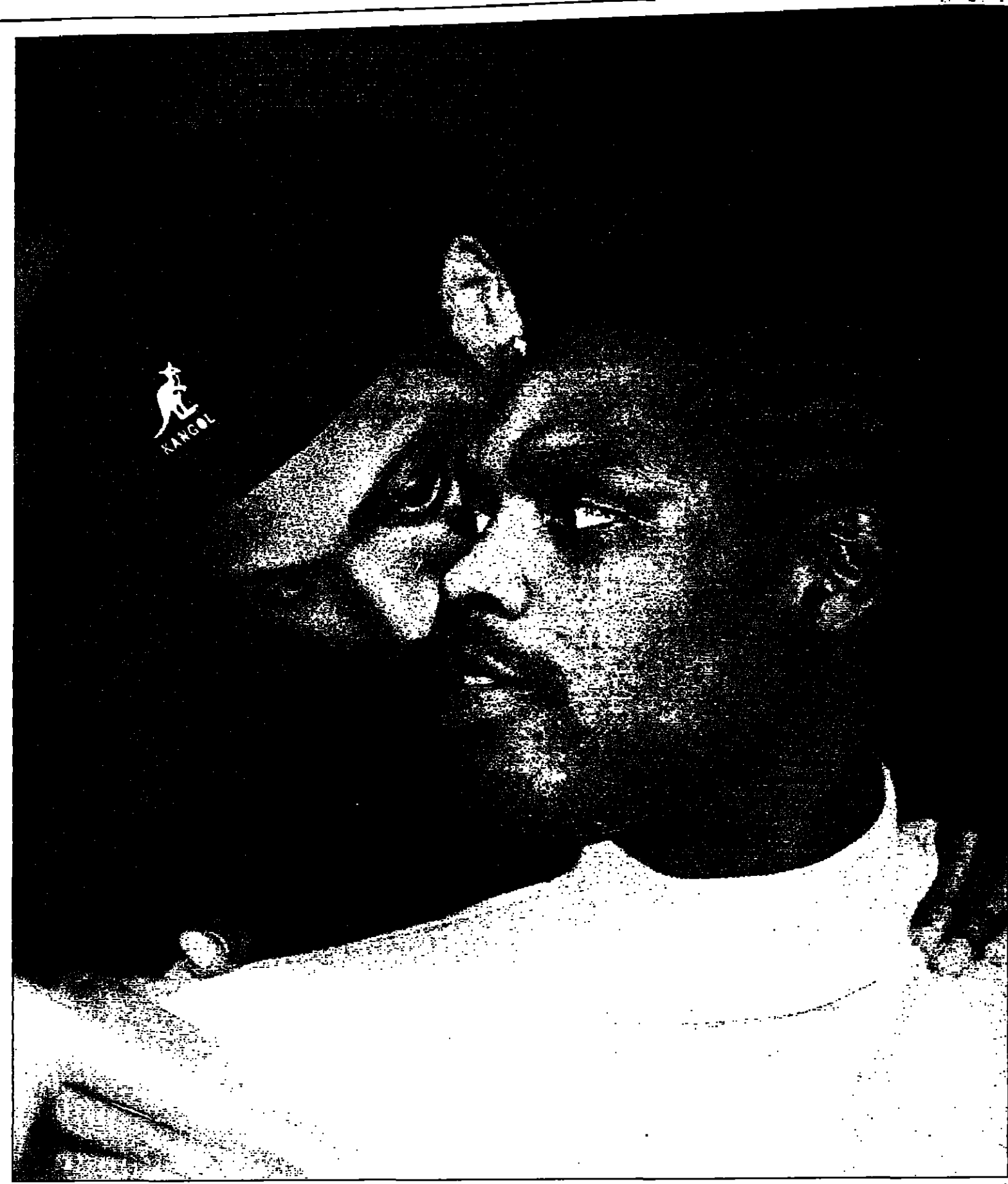
But on Tuesday night he achieved two ambitions in one match - a full first-team return and, of even greater personal significance, the sweetest goal he has ever scored.

Yet today's arrival of the Norwegian forward Harald Brattbakk means he faces a challenge to stay in the Celtic side. Jackson insists he welcomes the £2m signing of Brattbakk from Rosenborg.

"You need competition for places at a big club like Celtic, where success is expected. It means you have to be at the top of your form every week, but Harald's record suggests he is a penalty-box player, while I prefer to play deeper."

"It is going to affect me because I'm a striker, but it was a dream return for me. I'm in the team and I want to stay there."

- Bill Pierce



Robert Orray (left), of the LA Lakers basketball team, offers support to the banned Latrell Sprewell at a press conference

Photograph: AFP

Barkley's boycott threat over banned Sprewell

Charles Barkley says if the National Basketball Association does not reduce its punishment of Latrell Sprewell, the league's top American players could boycott next summer's World Championship or the league's All-Star Game.

"I think I'd have great support for a boycott," Barkley

said yesterday. "I've talked with several players about it. The league is run by the stars and this is something bigger than all of us."

Sprewell's contract was terminated by the Golden State Warriors last Wednesday, costing him the \$25m (£15.6m) he was to be paid over the final

three years of his four-year deal, for his attack on the Golden State Warriors coach, P.J. Carlesimo. The league then suspended Sprewell for one year, making him ineligible to be signed by another NBA club until next December.

Meanwhile Sprewell, has apologised for his behaviour

and insisted his career should not be ruined after choking and threatening to kill the Carlesimo on 1 December.

"I know this conduct is not acceptable in society and professional sports. I accept responsibility for what I've done," the 27-year-old said. "I am a good person and I've

never had any situation like this come up before. I feel 10 years of hard work shouldn't be taken away for one mistake. My career didn't happen overnight and I don't feel it should be taken away overnight. I know I will do a better job controlling my temper and watching what I do."

Home hope for Wimbledon

Wimbledon's fans were yesterday given renewed hope that the club could finally be moving back home. The club issued a joint statement with Merton council, vowing: "We wish to reassure the supporters of Wimbledon FC that the club and the council share a common goal - to do everything possible to get the Dons back to Merton."

Wimbledon and Merton council - the local authority governing the club's natural home area in south London - have been at loggerheads for many years.

The club have accused council leaders of doing nothing to help them move back to their former home, while the council have insisted that it is not their responsibility to help

Wimbledon find a new ground. The threat of the Dons attempting to set up a new home in Dublin - a move opposed by fans in a series of demonstrations at recent games - remains.

But although yesterday's statement contains no specific solution to the problem, the fact that both sides have at least put aside their differences to agree publicly a common goal is a step forward.

Sam Hammam, Wimbledon's owner, has met the new council leader, Mike Brunt, who has been a fan of the club for 20 years, to discuss the possibilities of a new 20,000-capacity stadium on the site of Wimbledon greyhound stadium.

A feasibility study ordered by the council has given this plan

the green light, although Wimbledon are understood to want a bigger venue.

However, the two men will be meeting again to discuss "a wider study of the borough to see if we can identify one or more further sites where the club might be acceptably located".

They added: "We fully understand the supporters' anxieties and ambitions, and we give them our word that we are working together to realise their hopes of returning to Merton."

"It is important that the supporters recognise the enormous spirit of goodwill that now exists between us all and trust they will accept that we are doing everything possible to bring Wimbledon home."

- Mark Bradley

Milan car wreckers sent to Monza

The stars of Italy's Serie A had been enjoying the lifestyle of the fast-living footballer long before George Best brought his racy style to the streets of Manchester.

Women in high heels and high-powered cars have always gone hand in hand with performance on the pitch, but now it seems the wheels are coming off a little too often for the management at Milan.

Whereas Best went off the road in various boudoirs and bars, the multi-million pound investments from the Giuseppe Meazza stadium are becoming far too familiar with a variety

of crash barriers and ditches. The final straw came when the club's two French midfielders were lucky to walk away unhurt from accidents in recent weeks. First, Ibrahim Ba wrote off his Mercedes and then Marcel Desailly wrecked his Ferrari.

These were not the only incidents of a Milan player's vehicle parting company with the road. George Weah, the Liberian striker and World Footballer of the Year, escaped injury two seasons ago after crashing his car while returning to his home in France.

Faced with the prospect of

losing matches through having a squad weakened by autoroute mishaps rather than groin strains, Milan are planning to send their players on a two-day course in advanced driving.

The task of teaching the Milan speedsters to take their foot off the pedal has fallen to club official and former player Daniele Massaro. His choice of venue for the lessons is the famous Monza race track, home of the Italian Formula One Grand Prix.

It remains to be seen how slow Ba and Desailly will become. Hopefully, their pace on the pitch will not be affected.

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD
No. 3479, Thursday 11 December By Sparrow
Wednesday's solution

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ACROSS

- Initial blunders by first of presiding officers about Conservative party representative (10)
- Sun article on royal follows Sunday Times leaders (4)
- Coal you got at the end of last month? (5)
- Runner gives reason after entering English youth hostel (9)
- Know Glaswegian man's name (3)
- Indian mystic American's seen in Westminster (5)
- Honesty: one encounters it amongst refined gentry (9)
- Shrinks, at length? (14)
- What may appear to be opening remarks? (8,6)
- Review DA obtains, suggesting some form of torture (9)
- Dicky loves to do crossword (5)
- Words must be satisfied (3)
- Big drawer containing orchestra's bits and pieces (9)
- Past tense required, that's evident (5)
- Recalled being involved in cricket last season (4)
- Cartel says there are problems with pollution reducing devices (10)
- DOWN
- Exercises which involve matter raised in newspapers (5,3)
- Boots on railway showing balance (7)
- Gelatinous sweet - translate that into foreign language, please (7,7)
- Aware a gin and tonic's leaving one squiffy (9)
- Expert turning out pedantic, to some extent (5)
- Holidaymaker in French city, one getting lost, ultimately (7)
- Overnight flight taken by florid detective (3,3)
- Politician linked with Afghans possibly requiring a certain kind of humour? (6,3,5)
- Stars, with agreement from Russians, entering European capital (9)
- A plea for help about most advisable heat-resistant material? (8)
- Air route African runner's taken into Holland, not Switzerland (7)
- Further story's penned by French writer (7)
- Low-tech item you can count on? (6)
- A ring road traffic accident, leading to main artery (5)

©Published by Newpaper Publishing PLC, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL, and printed at Mirror Colour Print, St Albans Road, Watford.
Back issues available from Historic Newspapers, 01988 840780.
Thursday 11 December 1997 Registered as a newspaper with the Post Office.

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